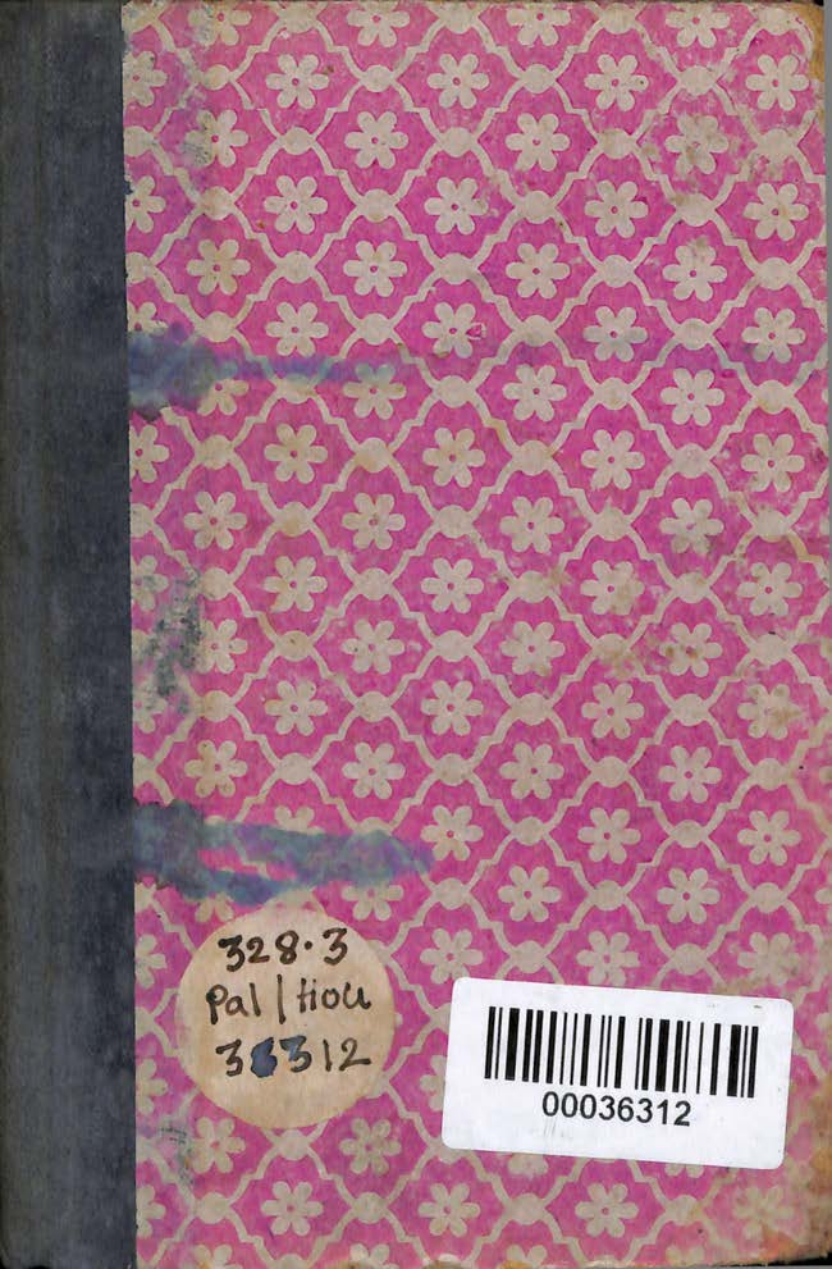
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THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Illustrations of its History and Practice.

A COURSE OF

THREE LECTURES,

DELIVERED TO THE

REIGATE SOUTH PARK WORKING MEN'S CLUB,

2ND, 9TH, AND 16TH DECEMBER, 1868.

36312

BY

REGINALD F. D. PALGRAVE.

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To

HENRY ELSYNGE, Esq.,
Clerk of the Parliaments, Author of the Modus Tenendi Parliamentum, A.D. 1625;

Sir SIMONDS D'EWES, Bart., M.P.,
Collector of A Compleat Journal of Proceedings in Parliament throughout the reign of Queen Elizabeth, A.D. 1631;

WILLIAM HAKEWEL, Esq., M.P.,
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HENRY SCOBELL, Esq.,
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WILLIAM PETTYT, Esq.,
Keeper of the Records, Author of the Ancient Rights of the Commons of England Asserted, A.D. 1683;

GEORGE PETTYT, Esq.,
Author of the Lex Parliamentaria, A.D. 1690;

JOHN HATSELL, Esq.,
Clerk of the House of Commons, Author of Precedents of Proceedings in the House of Commons, A.D. 1818;

Sir THOMAS ERSKINE MAY, K.C.B.,
Clerk Assistant of the House of Commons, Author of the Treatise on the Law and Usage of Parliament, A.D 1844–68;

These Pages are inscribed by

Their humble admirer and faithful Servant,

REGINALD F. D. PALGRAVE.

PRAYER FOR THE PARLIAMENT,

Read at the Table of the House of Commons.

ALMIGHTY God, we thine unworthy servants, here gathered together in Thy Name, do most humbly beseech Thee to grant, that we having Thy fear always before our eyes, and laying aside all private interests, prejudices, and partial affections, the result of all our counsels may be to the glory of Thy blessed Name, the maintenance of true religion and justice, the safety, honour, and happiness of the Queen, the public wealth, peace and tranquillity of the realm, and the uniting and knitting together of the hearts of all persons and estates within the same, in true Christian love and charity, one towards another, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PREFACE.

ENCOURAGED by kind assurance from my hearers that they were interested by my illustrations of the life of the House of Commons, I have ventured to print these Lectures as they were delivered, hoping that they may find readers in Village Club-rooms or Literary Institutions.

The authorities on which these Lectures are based are, I trust, sufficiently indicated by references; some, however, of my illustrations rest on the authority of my own experience, derived from ten years' service in the Journal Office of the House of Commons.

A few notes are added, containing some items of parliamentary study that would not blend in with the thread of my story.

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THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

LECTURE THE FIRST.

THE WAYS OF THE HOUSE.

Introduction.—How Votes are taken in the House of Commons.—Description of a great Division.—Disorder during Debate on the Grand Remonstrance, November 23, 1641.—Disorder again, May 10, 1675.—Mr. Grenville hissed in the Lobby of the House, February 1766.—A Division insisted on by one Member.—The Principles of Party Government.—How it affects Proceedings in the House of Commons.—The Stages of a Bill.—"This day six months."—The Royal Assent.—Forty-eight Bills "quashed" by Queen Elizabeth, February 9, 1597.—The Rejection of a Bill by King William III.—The Reason why Sovereigns cannot now reject a Bill.—The Look of the House of Commons to Mr. Moritz, in 1782.—The business qualities of the House.—Absurd Interruptions to Debate.—More solemn Interruptions.—Mr. Perceval's Death, May 11, 1812.—Noises during Debate.—A long Speech.—Rude Speech.—Mr. Jesson's Stare.—Would-be Orators.—Working Life of a Member of Parliament.—Working Hours after Midnight.—Debates all Night.—What is got by a Seat in Parliament.

ON the shore of the Thames, at the foot of Westminster Bridge, stands a building covering eight acres of ground, that contains 500 rooms, whose towers

rise in air 300 feet. It has cost three million pounds of sterling money; and there laws are made for thirty millions of human beings. That building is, I need not tell you, the Palace at Westminster, the House of Parliament.

It is my wish to exhibit to you, in some degree, the machinery by which that great manufactory of law and justice is worked, and to tell you a little about the history of the House of Commons. And your kindly presence here shows that you are willing to listen to my effort.

Stamped with true value, most worthy of study, is everything connected with our Parliament. Such is the wealth of interest that belongs to the House of Commons, that I regret the being able to offer only some slight glimpses of its history and practice. More, however, than a slight glimpse is impossible in a popular lecture. The history of the House of Commons is, in truth, the history of England during the last 600 years. The journal of its deeds fills 120 folio volumes, and these volumes contain such a store of precedents, the instances of former usage, that to settle one point alone, a committee collected 250 cases.[1]

[1] Tax Bills Report, 1860.

English history for 600 years,—120 folio volumes, compose, you will allow, a mighty quarry of knowledge. So large, indeed, is that quarry, that what to dig, and where to dig, is difficult to select; and part of the rock is, I must confess, very hard and dry. So I would beg you to bear in mind the difficulty of my attempt, and to content yourselves with samples, with detached bits only, of that great mine of information, the history and practice of the House of Commons. Of this I can assure you. As far as possible I have worked those veins in this quarry that sparkled most with incident or story; I have done my best to season information with amusement.

The corn lies many months in the field; then comes the short and busy harvest: the year-long care of the hop-grower is closed by the hurried hours of hop-picking. So is it in the House of Commons. Great national questions are for many months discussed there; the growth of opinion is cultivated by much debate. Then comes that bustling quarter of an hour, when our representatives decide the question by their votes. I purpose to begin this lecture by a picture of the House of Commons during that quarter of an hour. I think that you may be glad to understand the process of a division; to know how the

vote of the House is taken; how the members who say "Ay," are separated or divided from the members who shout "No."

We must take ourselves in fancy to the door of the House of Commons. We find ourselves in a crowd, standing in a restless, excited crowd; doors revolve to and fro; endless is the coming and going; ceaseless the tramp of feet, the buzz of tongues. The clock, truly, points to hours usually given to rest, but in this hall there is no rest. Blazing light so beats upon the eyesight, noise so fills the ear, the throb of expectation so commands the senses, that we feel as if repose may never return, or the excitement die away.

Such is the stir within and without that foreruns a division in the House of Commons, when our representatives go to the vote on some question of deep public interest. Yet where we are is but the ante-chamber, the outer hall of the room, whence this keen interest springs.

Standing, then, as we do, before the doorway of the House of Commons, we will try to look in. Variety, however, the scene does not afford: we can see nothing but a crowd of men. It covers the floor of the House, and the benches that rise, rank above

rank, on either hand; nothing here is visible but a sea of faces and a wall of backs, so packed full is the House, even to the threshold under our feet. Out of this throng of men, two, however, may be distinguished—the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Leader of the debate.

By the canopy overhead, by that long robe and wig of office, and by his look of dignity, the Speaker may be recognised. He sits raised up above the throng, calm and unmoved, the representative of order. And just below the Speaker, if you stand on tip-toe, a glimpse may be gained of the massive forehead and gleaming eyes of the Leader of the House. He is closing the debate; his speech ended, the vote of the House will be taken. But the Leader has not quite ceased from speech: he still commands his hearers by the power of his words. That must be true eloquence that can thus overawe, persuade, and kindle; that must be a master spirit who rules this excited crowd. The roof above rings, now with shouts of applause, now with laughter, now with cries of defiance. Then comes the silence of rapt attention; the House is hushed by the Leader of the debate. By his last few words he quenches the fever of political strife; he compels his hearers to feel, as he himself feels,

the mighty import of the moment—that they are in council for a nation's welfare, the legislators for a mighty empire.

Then shouts break forth—shouts of applause and shouts of defiance—when the spell of the orator is withdrawn. And the storm of noise is renewed by the fierce outcries of "Ay, ay!" and "No, no!" when the Speaker, rising to his feet, reads aloud the motion in debate. That over, the scene is changed; the moment of action is come.

All the doors of the House are thrown open, so are all the doors around us; and the summons to call the members to the vote is quickly passed along. Voices cry, "Division, division!" up and down the passages and corridors. And bells repeat the call, set jangling sharp and clear by the touch of an electric spark, that, in its circuit throughout that great building, flies over sixty miles of telegraph wire. Thus summoned, the members speed towards the entrance of the House. They pass in quickly; the electric bells continue their hurried jangle, and the walls re-echo to the cry of "Division, division!"

Two minutes of this rush of feet and rush of noise; then all outside, where we are standing, is quiet. The door of the House slams to; the turn of the lock

is heard. No one passes through that door till all is over, when once, at the Speaker's order, that bolt is shot. All within must vote; nor may any enter—not even the Prime Minister himself, if he be without—to join in the division.

Inside the House also, for the next quarter of an hour, the strife of tongues ceases. The members are silenced by the supreme anxiety of the moment; for now the division is actually begun. The Speaker has given the word, and the vote of the House of Commons must be taken.

There is a grating in the outside door of the House; looking through, we can see how the members who call out "Ay" are divided from those who say "No." We can watch the counting of the number of votes. Before us is a large square room; that is the House itself, the chamber for debate. Two long corridors flank this room. The corridor on one side is the "Ay" division-lobby; the other, the "No" division-lobby. The flock of members is a large one: to determine a critical question, all of the 658 members, who are not in bed ill, or out of the country, meet together. And to divide, perhaps 630 voters, the one party from the other; to hinder the possibility of a "No" by

mistake joining the "Ayes;" to record the names of these 630 members; to count the number of "Ayes" and "Noes,"—requires contrivance. That contrivance is before us: it consists of those two corridors or division-lobbies that flank the House.

Thus, when the Speaker has put the question, when he has commanded the House to divide, every member quits his seat, and walks off to give his vote; and this is the order of their march. Passing up the House, the "Ayes" face towards the Speaker, and circle round his chair into the western lobby. The "Noes," moving at the same time, take the contrary direction; they turn their backs on Mr. Speaker; they walk down the House, and file round into the eastern lobby. The separation of the two parties is thus complete. When penned into the division-lobbies, the names of the voters are taken down; and the number counted. This done, the members return to their places in the House.

So, during a division, all movement is transferred from the House itself to each division-lobby. The first batch of voters passes quickly down its length; then the stream gets packed; the crowd of members struggles on slower and slower in the lobby; it collects before the desk where the names are re-

corded, and around the door where the tellers stand to count the numbers. The crowd is generally serious enough; but sometimes a friend of the Government finds himself in the Opposition lobby, and escapes, before it is too late, amidst clouds of good-humoured "chaff." Sometimes, before the division is half over, the result of the vote is visible, and cheers burst from the winning side. In close-run fights, however, excitement lasts till the numbers are proclaimed. At last the stream of voters dwindles away, they press through the division-lobbies no longer in a throng, they struggle back into the House in twos and threes. Then the stream ceases altogether, the empty division-lobbies echo to the cry,—"All through."

So now the House is full again; the members have been counted, and are returned. This room, indeed, seems more crammed than ever: benches, floor, and galleries are flooded with a sea of eager faces. The fever-pulse of excitement rises every minute; the vote has been given, but the result is yet unknown. The fever rises yet higher; each side hopes they have the majority; and the fever rises higher still, for hope struggles against fear.

This, then, is what we wait for—for the report of the numbers of the division. And the time of

final waiting, though it be barely three minutes, appears long. At last we see the end approach. We can see, through the dense crowd upon the floor of the House, four gentlemen pushing towards the Speaker's chair. These are the tellers of the division. With difficulty they meet. At length they face the Speaker in a row, side by side. A cheer suddenly bursts forth; a shout, sharp, sudden, and decisive. It must be winners who shout like that. Victory, in truth, that moment had declared itself; the conquering party saw in their teller's hand the badge of success,—the paper bearing the number of the votes: he carries the record of the division. The shouts are hushed with difficulty; the House starts up: all are furious to know more, to hear the exact number of the votes. Triumphantly that is proclaimed aloud by the teller for the winners. Triumphantly the winners echo back their delight; and again and again shouts explode and roar, when the Speaker formally announces the decision of the House, and again and again, till the roof above us rings. Doors everywhere immediately fly open. The shouts begin again in the lobby outside; the crowd moves to and fro; feet rush to the telegraph stations; the electric wires are set at work through-

out the country; the click, click, of the telegraph hand is heard across the sea. Up Fleet Street hurry the newspaper reporters, fast as horse can tear: the stir in Westminster spreads to the printers in the City. The strength of steam-power races after the electric spark; the newspaper printing presses roll and shake; and in about an hour after the division, the railways take up the movement. The damp newspaper sheets are bundled into the vans; the early morning trains speed away, laden with the story of the great division.[1] From minute to minute, faster and faster, further and further, those tidings spread in ever-widening circle from the Speaker's chair.

Thus has the House of Commons shaped out our nation's history, session after session. Thus was free trade in corn obtained; the reform of Parliament effected; and ministry after ministry overthrown.

Stormy as are the debates that forerun such divisions, fierce as is the war of tongues, not since a year long past have the Commons witnessed any approach to open violence. When England's liberty was in jeopardy, just before the outbreak of the

[1] This feat of journalistic dexterity was performed by the *Times*, Saturday morning, April 28, 1866.

great civil war between King Charles I. and the Parliament, once indeed, then, did the House see its inmates on the verge of a death-grapple: blood-shed in the House itself, by members' hands, was imminent. On Monday, November 22, 1641, the Commons drew up a statement, picturing the long-continued evil which King Charles and his ministers had inflicted on his subjects. The debate went on all that Monday, past midnight, far into Tuesday morning: the debate was long, stormy, passionate, full of bitter feeling. Stormy, too, were the times. Ireland was in rebellion. England was full of plots. The King's friends in the House battled for him earnestly; with difficulty had the Remonstrance, describing that misgovernment, been agreed to. Then it was proposed to print and publish that narrative of the systematic injustice to which England had been exposed—illegal taxes, illegal imprisonments, ruin to trade, injury to all: it was proposed that the nation should see what the Commons had done to obtain redress; that England might read over the story of its misery.

The outburst of anger, that nearly closed in blood-shed, sprang from that motion to publish abroad this "Grand Remonstrance" of 1641. The debate

had lasted fifteen hours; all were weary and exasperated; all most ready to be provoked. That proposal to publish the Remonstrance did provoke to fury those who sided with the King against the people. A chance word lighted up the House, as a spark explodes gunpowder. In a rage, all started to their feet; with threatening cries, and threatening gestures, some members waved their hats on high, others loosened their swords. One moment,—and those swords had been sheathed in each other's sides; in blind fury the members were all but slaughtering each the other, each man striking against his neighbour. Event so fatal was mercifully prevented. One, whose name is a bye-word for true nobility, Mr. Hampden, with a few calm sentences, caught the attention of those angry men; he stayed that plague of savage passion; but it required all the command of Hampden's resolved dignity to quiet and subdue the House of Commons during those early hours of Tuesday, November 23, 1641.[1]

Never again has such a scene been repeated; once only, about thirty-five years later, on May 10, 1675, was it approached. King Charles II. then filled the throne; the company around him was the worst

[1] Forster's "Grand Remonstrance," p. 110 (Ed. 1858).

company in the world; the Government was as bad as the Court, and the House of Commons as riotous as the rest. A dispute broke out during a division; the members in uproar quitted their seats; they rudely jostled against each other, pushing, an angry mob, upon the floor of the House; one man, it is said, spat in his fellow's face; swords were drawn, and a fray was imminent; when the Speaker of the House, by an exhibition of timely firmness, restored order.[1]

Never, since that day, has anger among the members touched upon open violence. So now, returning to our station before the door of the House of Commons, the division being over, we see all present troop away—both the winners and losers, both Government and Opposition, both the shouters of "Ay" and those who cried out "No," all in very good harmony. Still the excitement of the moment prevails; the lobby still resounds to the tramp of feet, and to peals of triumphant laughter, to bursts of applause; the rival leaders of the debate are alike saluted with many a cheer—groans and hisses are out of season in the hour of victory.

Good humour, however, is not always possible.

[1] Hatsell, ii. 201.

Just a century ago, a leading statesman lost his temper, tried by defeat in the House, and by hisses in the lobby. This was Mr. George Grenville, for some years the prime minister to King George III. When in office, Mr. Grenville laid a tax upon our American colonies. The tax was resisted there: the end of that resistance you know—the establishment of the United States of America; and the injustice of the tax was also strongly felt in England. A successful effort was made to procure its abolition; the tax was repealed—not, however, till after hot debates. And on the night when the repeal was carried, when the last victorious division had been taken, the members streaming out of the House found themselves surrounded by a throng of men, and deafened by shouts and cheers. The leading City merchants, eager to know the result of the debate, had waited in the lobby all through that night, till the late sunlight of a February morning was almost visible. Tired and excited, the expectant crowd was naturally somewhat noisy. The members who voted against the tax were loudly welcomed; the imposer of the tax, Mr. Grenville, was loudly hooted. By nature haughty and ungracious, smarting under defeat, Mr. Grenville turned against the hissing

crowd; he stepped forward and took one of them by the throat. The man providentially had some fun about him: good-humoured, he converted into laughter the anger of his friends. "Well," said he, "if I must not hiss, I may laugh;" and he responded to Mr. Grenville's tugs upon his coat-collar by peals of laughter. The affair was thus made ridiculous; the joke spread, and Mr. Grenville escaped from the rough handling that his anger might have provoked.[1]

Divisions in the House of Commons, resembling my description, when the room is crammed with members, the shouting loud, and the excitement great, are rarely seen more than once a session. But whether those voting be few or many, still a division causes much interruption: debate is stopped; the House has to be cleared—to be emptied into the adjoining corridors; every member has to quit his seat and to march backwards and forwards, in and out of a division-lobby. Delay and trouble must arise. And sometimes divisions are insisted on solely to cause delay and trouble. In such divisions there may not seem to you much sense,—true

[1] Feb. 22, 1766. Mahon, "Hist." v. 141. Forster's "Goldsmith," i. 437.

enough; but when men are out-voted, when what they dislike is agreed to, men are not always cool and wise. So if the heat of vexation fills the heads of the few, however few they may be, they can thus plague the many who have voted against them. Division then follows after division, hard and fast, in quick succession; the doors of the House are closed, and the doors are opened; and the members are driven round and round the House, and in and out of the division-lobbies. Any excuse is taken; any trivial motion serves as a plea for demanding a division. Thus, in a session long ago, a determined score compelled above a hundred of their fellow-members to dance for twelve long hours to and fro the House, by driving them to twenty-three divisions.[1] On a single stage of a bill, as many as sixteen divisions have been compelled, all on most frivolous questions, by only 9 voters against 127.[2] And a bill once met by tooth and nail, or rather heel and toe resistance, provoked no less than fifty-one divisions. Thus, as the time spent in a division is never less than ten minutes, by this means of annoyance the Opposition forced the House of Commons to spend between six and seven hours, merely in

[1] March 12, 1771. [2] Copyright Bill, 1839.

walking backwards and forwards in and out of the division-lobbies.[1]

Again, a division may be demanded, not to throw out a motion, but to record the names of its opposers. For this is the rule of the House: when a resolution is carried, unless a division be taken against it, it is entered in the Journal, as if all agreed to it; if the motion be thrown out, as if all rejected it. The Commons never suffer the few to diminish the authority of the many; a final decision governs all alike. Refinement in government only breeds confusion: there is no use trying to soften a defeat. When the minority have said "No" for the last time in the division-lobby, they can say no more.

Still, to place on record who were for and who against a motion, a member not unfrequently compels a division. And if this be his object, no grumble is ever heard. When, however, the division is but the whim of a single man, his colleagues get impatient; if the struggle be protracted, the scene is a curious one.

The House, we will suppose, is sitting late; the long debate has ended; opposition has shrunk to a single voice; it is far past midnight; the motion

[1] Arms (Ireland) Bill,. 1843.

carried, all will gladly hurry off. So the welcome sound of the Speaker's voice at length is heard; he puts the question; gladly the "Ayes" shout their assent. The Speaker too is of their opinion; he also affirms that the "Ayes have it." "The Noes have it," is bolted out, short and sharp, in flat contradiction—the cry of the one resolute opponent: roars from many throats re-contradict him, bellowing forth "The Ayes have it." And again the Speaker, hoping to quench the flame, re-echoes with mild authority, "The Ayes have it." "The Noes have it," is barked back; and once more the cry of that single "No" is drowned by the clamour of the many. In vain: one man can compel the whole House to go to a division; that solitary "No," therefore, asserts his power: he is in order, though out of season. So the division has to be: the Speaker sits down; the members look grim, and buzz together like angry bees; the electric bells are set a jangling; the empty corridors resound to the shout of "Division!" doors fly open; the members troop back, wondering at the call. They do not look pleased—anything but pleased—when they learn the cause. They cluster round the solitary "No;" they storm, they insist, they protest, they beg him not to drive

the House through the division-lobbies. In vain; Mr. "No" continues obstinate. The doors slam to; the Speaker rises, and he puts the question; a shout of "Ay" explodes from all. Mr. Speaker then fixes his face in the direction of Mr. "No;" he says almost sternly, most decisively, "The Ayes have it." And then, at last, usually they do "have it;" the one against the many yields; he cannot face the storm of dislike and annoyance his obstinacy has provoked; he contradicts no more. And the motion is carried, at last, amidst much laughter, much noise, and the good humour of everybody, Mr. "No" included.

Often as I must picture to you the House of Commons as a place of abundant noise, so often shall I have to say, that the much noise is coupled with much laughter, much good humour, much gentleman-like forbearance.

The zest and pungency of a party-fight so animates throughout a parliamentary debate, when the whole House of Commons is "whipped" together to a division; a war spirit is so obviously the ruling spirit of the hour, that it is natural to suppose that Parliament exists only as a sort of cockpit for the game of politics. This is not the case. The House

of Commons is not solely the battle-field between men in office and men out of office; the pursuit of place and power is not the end of Parliament. Yet at first sight it looks uncommonly as if it were, —reasonably so enough. For it is party-spirit that keeps the wheels of our State machinery on the move; for, in truth, legislation and the course of government are directed by the conflict in Parliament between her Majesty's Government and her Majesty's Opposition. For it is by that conflict that the will of the nation is expressed.

This is the mode of action. We, the outsiders to Parliament, are separated, the one from the other, by two broad lines of distinction; we are either those who approve of the world as it is, or else we are of the party that craves to see the world as they think it might be. The one is the party of content; the other is the party, not of discontent, but of reformation. And as Parliament legislates by authority received from the whole nation, as we send members to the House of Commons to act according to our opinions, these opinions are necessarily brought there into direct conflict: that conflict is decided by the votes in the division-lobbies. The course of government, the legislation of our

country, is thus determined by these votes, and by these great divisions.

This system is called party government: for good or ill, it is the way we have been governed for many years, and the result has been altogether for good. In that political conviction I trust we all agree. But the way of our government—government by parties in the State—is not a way of unmixed good; the nation would be better off if legislation did not spring from conflict. A battle is only another word for mischief, for destruction. Though a parliamentary battle may not lay waste the nation, still it wastes time and energy; it keeps many a useful man out of power, and delays many a useful measure. It is most desirable that Parliament should legislate without the stimulus of party-jealousy and party-strife.

So long, however, as our nation governs by its Parliament,—till we all agree, till every man is of one mind with his neighbour, government by parties will be our government. And this principle runs through every action by the House of Commons; nothing takes place there that does not tell of the influence of party-strife. The fate of a Ministry, the triumph of the Opposition, result from any ques-

tion under debate. A vote compelling the Government to lay a paper before Parliament, a motion for adjournment, or a decision about an election—trivial as may be such matters—have driven governments from office. The direct course to that end is a motion that the Ministers of the Crown possess not the confidence of Parliament; that carried, the Ministers, of course, must change places with the Opposition. And that stage in the passage of a bill through Parliament, its second reading, is also often chosen as an occasion for a party-battle: why this stage is chosen is worth explanation.

Every Act of Parliament, you know, begins as a bill in Parliament: in that shape it receives approval from the Legislature. A bill in Parliament is then a draft law, a law in preparation; and our system of law-making in Parliament prescribes that a bill must pass through three stages—the first, second, and third readings. Before printing was invented, each bill was actually read aloud three times over in both Houses of Parliament: all thus heard and thought the bill over. Hence that expression, "a reading." Equally now bills are read and discussed by members of Parliament; but they read the bills to themselves, and come prepared to debate the

principle of the measure in the House. For it is the principle of a bill, the object of each law, that is discussed by the House itself; the exact wording of the bill is considered by a committee.

Hence, then, is the motive of selecting that stage —the second reading—as the chief occasion for the discussion of a bill; for it is settled at that stage, whether or no the bill can be at all approved of, whether it be right in principle. If the bill be wholly objectionable, its opposers propose that the bill be read a second time upon this day six months. "This day six months" is a parliamentary expression for "to-morrow come never," and the motion is so accepted. This form of opposition is considered to have a courteous sound. In ancient times members were not so civil spoken; if they disliked a bill, "away with it" was cried out; or they stoutly proposed that the offending roll of paper be "dashed," torn, rejected, kicked out of the House, or tossed over the table by the Speaker.

Supposing, however, that a bill is not dashed, or torn, or kicked out by the Commons, but passes successfully through all its stages; it is then decorously tied up and carried to the House of Lords, with a civil message written on the cover in old law

French, soliciting the Peers' approval. This they signify by reading it three times. These stages passed, the bill is all but an Act of Parliament. But it is not so, till the Sovereign gives assent. For, as you are aware, the concurrence of those estates of the realm, the Commons, the Lords, and the Sovereign, is essential to the laws that govern us.

That is a time-honoured ceremony,—the Royal assent. As 300 years ago Queen Elizabeth signified her Royal assent to bills; so now, Queen Victoria converts bills in Parliament into Acts of Parliament. She seats herself on the throne in the House of Lords; the title of each Bill is read out to her; she bows, and the bow from the Queen authorizes the Clerk of the Parliaments to signify the Royal assent. This he does, by repeating aloud the words "*La Reyne le veult*," or as we should say in English, "The Queen wills it." This use of a French sentence in our parliamentary proceedings—those words, "*La Reyne le veult*"—is a memento of that Norman French king, King William the Conqueror, who crossed the Channel eight centuries ago, and overcame England in the year 1066.

Three hundred years ago is far enough off for us: to return to the time of Queen Elizabeth. When she

seated herself on the throne, on the 9th of February, 1597; and the Lords and Commons assembled to hear her consent to the bills they had passed: that Queen used a form that neither Queen Victoria nor any Sovereign hereafter can use, if they observe the principles of our Constitution. Queen Elizabeth "quashed," so the Journal tells us, "forty-eight several bills which had passed" through Parliament.[1] She disapproved those bills, and she took the legal mode of expressing her dissent. As the title of bill after bill was read aloud before her, she said, "that she would take time to think about it." Thus Parliament heard the Queen, in a few minutes, throw out forty-eight bills; nor was remonstrance possible; such a step was out of the question when Queen Elizabeth was on the throne. But nearer our time, when William III. was king, that attempt was made. The Commons tried to force the King to forego his undoubted right of "quashing" a bill in Parliament. This was their provocation.

During the year 1693, a bill, after much debate, was agreed to by Parliament, and it was offered to King William for his consent. Nor was the proposed law a matter for indifference; both Houses

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 596.

were hot to get it passed, for it touched themselves; the object of the bill was the protection of Parliament from undue influence by the Sovereign. So, when the appointed hour came, to see the last stroke given, to see their work completed, many members assembled behind the bar of the House of Lords. They wished to hear the Royal assent given to the Parliamentary Proceedings Bill: to refuse assent, they never thought the King would dare. But William III. was always ready to dare much, and that day he was as ready as ever. He seated himself on the throne; the ceremony began. As usual, the titles of the bills were read before him. All passed,—till the title, "A Bill touching free and impartial Proceedings in Parliament," was heard. And, as usual, the Clerk of the Parliaments looked towards the throne, expectant of the King's bow of assent. But no bow followed; the King thought that the bill touched his power unfairly. So the Clerk had to declare that the King would think about the bill. Its rejection caused amazement. The Commons left the House of Lords in anger. They collected all the members, locked the door of their House, and shut out every stranger. A strongly-worded remonstrance to the King was immediately voted. It was carried to the

King; he would not give way; he maintained his legal right to dissent to bills in Parliament. Such an answer provoked, of course, a renewed storm; even though most specially then, was the storm unseasonable. For the time was critical: England was at war with France; plots at home were rife against the Government; the King's ill-wishers were many and powerful; and seeing King and Commons thus at open variance, they were triumphant. They were too openly triumphant. The Commons felt that to quarrel with the King was to make sport for England's enemies. The House submitted in silence, though reluctantly.[1] They never questioned the King's power, or his legal right: King William III. could dissent, as well as give assent to a bill. It is not so now. Queen Victoria must never find herself compelled to declare, that she will think about a bill: from that situation her ministers should protect her.

For such is the present constitution of our Government; and hence is it that the Royal assent to a bill is the only form that Parliament ought to hear from the throne—never the Royal dissent: it is because our monarchs act solely through their ministers; and because there must be thorough agreement, not only

[1] Macaulay, "Hist." vii. 106.

between a king and his ministers, but between the ministers and the Parliament. If they see Parliament resolute to pass a bill to which they object,—a bill which they feel their Sovereign must not agree to,—the ministry should resign office. For if they have not the confidence of Parliament, if it has carried the bill against the wish of the King's ministers, they ought to be his ministers no longer, or else that Parliament ought not to exist; for that resource is in their power. They can, at any moment, stop a bill in Parliament altogether, by advising the King to dissolve Parliament; which puts an end both to the bill and to the Parliament. The King also, for his part, if he disapproves of the conduct of the ministry, if he sees them urging Parliament to vote a bill which he could not pass,—equally that ministry ought not to be the King's ministers; he ought to dismiss them, and replace them by ministers pledged to resist the measure; with whom he can, in fact, agree.

But, "there is no stretching of power." In describing the working of our Constitution, I must here come to a full stop; and this proverb will explain why—"an two men ride one horse, one must sit next the head." For it is so with a nation: the

reins of government must be held by one hand; some one must be the chief; some single power must be at the head of affairs. And, according to the system of our government, that power and headship is vested in Parliament.

You will see this to be the case, when the problem of our Constitution is thus worked out. No ministry can serve our Sovereigns, save by the authority they receive from Parliament; and no Sovereign can govern, save according to the advice of his ministers. So it is to Parliament that the King's ministers are in the end accountable,—it is Parliament that holds the reins of government.

Just eighty-five years ago, the Commons forced upon their King, George III., a ministry personally every way odious to him. As the King could not openly resist Parliament, he resisted it in an underhand manner: he secretly overthrew the authority of the House; thus he got rid of the ministry he hated.[1] Such a struggle was full of danger; it might have provoked an overthrow of all order, of all civil government.

That such a contest—Parliament opposing the King's will, the King secretly subverting Parliament

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." (2d Ed.), i. 58.

—took place only eighty-five years ago, should be borne in mind; for the system of government then was just the same as that in working now. Yet it nearly broke down. This lesson at least is obvious from that event. We talk about the stability of our Government; we boast about the firm roots of the British Constitution. And certainly such a scheme as ours—a Sovereign acting solely through his ministers, those ministers responsible to the Parliament, a House of Commons that truly represents the nation—has much stability. The distribution of power is even; risk of clash and collision between rival interests is avoided. Our State system is a system very happily balanced; but this happy balance may after all be most easily upset, for it stands on no firmer footing than the good sense, the right conduct of the whole community. Checks placed between the governing bodies in the realm—such breakwaters against the rush and overflow of selfish interests—are a help to good government; but they are only helps; our sole security is in ourselves. The root of government is but discretion. If our Kings, ministers, Parliaments, and people are discreet, wise and temperate, the system of our government will help us to

keep in the right path. But our Constitution will prove no hedge against danger if we act otherwise. However well balanced the Government may be, if classes and powers in the State resist each other, overreach each other, Government will give place to disorder. Thus if a free and popular Constitution such as ours, is strong with the strength of the whole people, it has also its special weakness; for the very existence of authority depends on the support of all—responsibility as well as power is spread to all. Let each one govern One. This, in earnest truth, then, must be our principle of action; and if the King governs the King, his ministers govern themselves, and every one of us governs himself, our nation may boast of a strong and stable Government.

That crisis in the political life of the House of Commons, a great division, formed the opening subject of this lecture. It is right that you should have a picture of the House when the crisis is over, when events are dull and tranquil. Prosperous is that nation whose uneventful history is but flat reading; and most useful is the House of Commons when the debates are uninteresting. Excitement disturbs, though it certainly does amuse; usefulness, in

common, wears a quiet aspect; and such, I am glad to say, is generally the aspect of the House of Commons.

A dingy room, filled with men, not enthroned in state, not robed in dignified drapery, but sitting at their ease, and dressed just as they chose, hatted, great-coated, in boots and spurs; some lying sprawling on the benches, others eating nuts and oranges. In the middle of the room is a table; clerks, in wig and gown, are busy writing at it; behind the table stands a high chair, whereon sits a personage clad in a black gown, and crowned by an enormous, bushy, powdered wig. And what goes on here? Noise, laughter, the stamp of feet up and down the room, shouts of "Oh! Oh!" Heedless of this tumult, a fat, swarthy, slovenly man stands near the table; upon it he vigorously bangs and thumps his fist; he turns his face towards the high chair and the enormous wig; he waves his arms; evidently he is speaking; he is addressing the disorderly crowd around. The voice of the fat, swarthy man at length rises above the din; the noise of "Oh! Oh!" dies away; the cry of "Hear him! hear him!" resounds instead, with hearty utterance. The eyes of the debater sparkle with the light of genius;

his face kindles with enthusiasm; to enthusiasm he kindles all his hearers; his torrent of persuasive eloquence carries them along; again they answer back, with hearty zeal, "Hear him! hear him!"

Such was the picture that the House of Commons presented in session, 1782, to a Mr. Moritz, a literary gentleman from Berlin, that year a visitor in England.[1] The fat, slovenly orator was the famous Charles Fox; the personage in the enormous wig was Speaker Cornwall. And Mr. Moritz was a man of true insight. Dingy was that room, disorderly was the demeanour of its occupants, clumsy-looking was Charles Fox; yet Mr. Moritz perceived the wonderful gift of that great orator, and he felt that the sight of the House of Commons alone repaid him for the journey from Berlin; and a journey from Berlin, then, meant fatigue, discomfort, and exposure, of which we have now no notion.

You can hardly suppose that this description of the House of Commons pictures the members engaged in dull and quiet usefulness: shouts and hooting noises, and walking to and fro, seem to

[1] "Travels through several Parts of England," by Charles Moritz (1782). Pinkerton (Ed. 1808), ii. 506.

compose a strange kind of good order; still, such is the kind of order in which our representatives generally conduct their work. A bygone Speaker once remarked from the chair, that the House of Commons was "no school for manners." True enough; but the House is a very good school for work. A business character distinguishes its proceedings, and close argument its debates. We hear in the House more dates and facts than appeals to the feelings; more biting words than soothing expressions; to convince rather than to delight the hearers is the chief end of speeches there. Self-laudation, puffs of the nation's glory, we never hear; members are not prone to sound the praises of the British lion; they do not flourish the flag that braves the battle, or offer to die upon the altar of the Constitution. They had better not. Such high-flying sentences would be greeted with laughter, not with "Hear him!"

Nor is favour shown there, even to just praises of that ancient freedom, that ancient justice, we have so long enjoyed. "How is it, I never hear a word about the blessings of liberty, and the glory of the British Constitution, in your debates?" was asked of a member of Parliament. "Because we take all

that for granted,"[1] was his answer; and the answer was worthy of the sagacity of the House. Fine words won't do there, but noble ones will, and simple words too, if flashed upon the hearers with the white light of sincerity, if winged to their hearts by downright heartiness. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies;" and we have in the House of Commons such wise "masters,"—men who are gifted with that eloquence that springs from the love of truth.

The characteristic truly of the House of Commons is order in disorder; it does get to what it wants, though the way be rough; confusion there is more apparent than real. And being thus hearty at their work, the Commons do not fear to take things as they come. When tickled with a joke, they laugh with thorough good will: they roar in answer, when with the sparkle of a bright face, with the wave of an adroit hand, a merry story is sent spinning round the benches. And if the touch of fun the House thus quickly obeys, not less quick is it to obey the pressure of serious words. Even a

[1] Reply of Sir J. Mackintosh, quoted from C. Knight's "Passages of a Working Man's Life."

smile—if the smile be out of season—is laudably restrained. Here is an instance. The House was listening to a tongue eloquent as any; the theme of debate was worthy of grave thought—the horrors of war—and it was treated worthily; though far past midnight the House gave no sign of impatience. To illustrate the operation of that curse, the member speaking pictured those blessings that war destroys, the happiness of happy childhood: "What should I now see," he said, "if I now went home; my children playing by my fireside." At these words, many an eye was turned to the clock, and the glimmer of a grin twinkled over many a face; for the moment when those words were uttered was two o'clock in the morning. What, children up and about at two o'clock in the morning? at play round the fire long after midnight? Heaven forbid! was felt by all: the absurdity of the notion almost set the House into a laugh. But none was heard: no one could disturb by mirth a true, sad story of human misery.

Still it is a tight hold that stops a laugh; mere trifles have upset the gravity of our lawgivers. I do not know the date of the following absurd accident that set members on the roar, but it must have been long ago; for it took place when swords were worn

by gentlemen, and when wigs covered their heads. One evening then, while the debate was in full swing, a tall, grim-faced member rose from his seat, got up and walked down the floor of the House. He moved along stately; his eyes were fixed in an austere and solemn stare. Behind him, close behind him, crept in timid eagerness, a shabby, puny member, miserly in look and gait. Bursts of laughter pealed forth. And why? Because there went the haughty gentleman upon his solemn promenade, but all unconscious that his sword-hilt had whisked a dirty brown wig from off the head of his neighbour on the bench, the miser Elwes—and quite unconscious that the wretched wig still dangled upon the sword-hilt. And there, too, at his heels, went the wig's owner, shuffling swiftly along, bobbing in vain after his dirty brown wig.[1] It must have been a funny sight. And in times further back, the Commons so greatly enjoyed such small comicalities, that they recorded them in their Journal. For instance, we find on those venerable pages this entry, dated Thursday, May 31, 1604: "A jackdaw flew in at the window" of the House, and that the jackdaw "was called omen to the bill" in debate; a bad omen apparently, for

[1] Mr. Harford's "Recollections of Wilberforce," 171.

the bill was soon after thrown out. Again we are told that on May 14, 1606, "A dog comes in. A strange spanyell, of mouse colour, came into the House of Commons."

Nor was this precedent forgotten by the dogs of Westminster. Everything in Parliament follows precedent; and, about 170 years after, the spaniel's conduct was followed too. A dog again boldly came into the House, and took his seat there, before the Speaker, the Prime Minister, and all the representatives of Great Britain. Not content with silence, the dog joined in the proceedings,—he barked stoutly. Lord North, the then Prime Minister, was also sharing in the debate. Amused, he appealed to the Speaker, "Sir, I am interrupted by a new member." The dog did not take the hint; his speech of "bow, wow, wow," continued; and the good-humoured Premier kept up the joke: "the new member," he said, "had no right to speak twice in one debate."[1]

Comic incidents such as these have not been the sole interruptions to business in the House of Commons. One evening in March 1833, a madman gained access, and rushed up to the table in

[1] "Recollections of Wilberforce," 93.

the middle of the House, and cried out pitiably that he was being poisoned by the Prime Minister. The same session, also, a stranger in the Gallery loudly contradicted the member speaking. There have been, too, interruptions of a more solemn cast.

The sudden death of men conspicuous to the world, suddenly told of in the House, has awed and hushed debate. When word ran down the benches that the Emperor of Russia was dead, stifled by bronchitis, in that bitter winter of the Crimean War, the news might be traced along the House by the awe-struck look it caused. Involuntarily all seemed to cease from work, to think of that unyielding monarch, thus stayed by death's hand; and to think of the war, and of the world's ambition. So potent is the strong contagion of fellow-feeling that binds a crowd of men together. The Emperor's death was no loss to us—it was far away from us in every way. He was our chief enemy; by his death even we might gain. And every one in the House of Commons had his own separate way of thinking of that death; each looked at it from his own point of view; and in no case from the same point of view. Yet all the members seemed chilled and subdued by the news: on the face of all alike was awe, even regret for the

Emperor of Russia. Death by illness, however, is an ordinary occurrence. When those extraordinary and horrid tidings came across the Atlantic that the President Lincoln, the chief ruler of America, had been murdered, during all that day no one could look at the House and doubt, merely from its look, but that some terrible event had happened, so quieted were the footsteps, so overcast the face of every member.

It was natural, in times gone by, that the House of Commons should be panic-struck by a false rumour of the death of King James I., on the 22nd of March, 1605; that business should be stayed that day. And it was equally to be looked for that members should be unable to continue debate that evening of the 11th of May, 1812, when the Prime Minister, Mr. Perceval, shot by a madman, fell and sank in death at the very door of the House of Commons. Such events must overcome all, anyhow; even had they not been so close at hand. But it shows sympathy of a finer touch, and it speaks well for the House of Commons, that tragic death affecting distant lands should for a few minutes hush debate with a strong though silent compassion.

Mr. Moritz, the German traveller, saw an event in the House of Commons that occurs there now, just as it happened eighty years ago, just as it did 300 years ago. It is a pity that Mr. Moritz saw this occurrence—that it should be ever seen; but it will take place so long as man's patience is of penetrable stuff. Mr. Moritz heard and saw an untimely debater coughed down; he heard one member of Parliament compelled by his brother members to cease talking; to resume his seat, and to leave off his speech. Mr. Moritz heard that day, just as we hear now, the peal of portentous coughs, the yell of "Question! question! question!" the ironical cheer, the burst of laughter, the chorus, "Oh, oh, oh!" by which vexed members compel each other to be silent. "This must needs," as Mr. Moritz says, "be a distressing situation." It must be so indeed: it certainly distresses all, even those who witness it. The usage, at least, is no novelty. We fancy Englishmen of Queen Elizabeth's time to be grave and solemn; yet those old Parliament men, if their ears were irritated, silenced the debater by ugly noises in the throat; when impatient, they "hawked, and spat, and kept up a great coil."[1] And now, though members do not

[1] Nov. 16, 1601. D'Ewes' "Journal," 640.

do anything with their throats save make a noise, still if the member on his legs will not take the hint, prodigious is the noise that follows.

For such an uncouth expression of a craving for silence, the Commons have much excuse. It is their only way; they have not, as other assemblies have, a time-limit fixed for speeches. A member in possession of the House with his tongue may keep it for ever. Thus limitless may be a speech. A gentleman one day looked into the House, left it, took horse and rode to Wimbledon; he dined there, rode back to Westminster, and he found the same member speaking, engaged in the same speech that our traveller had seen and heard when he started for his dinner in the country.[1] So at least runs the story. The experience is not impossible. Speeches of four, five, or six hours' duration have been heard in the House within our day. Nor are members intolerant of dull speech. It is when they want their dinner, or to hear a leader close the debate, that impatience takes this awkward form. Still it is, at best, an ugly custom, and it has provoked terrible outbursts of passion. Mr. O'Connell once retorted, that he would not be put down by

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 395.

"beastly bellowing;"[1] and Mr. Burke, that he would not be silenced by such "yelping," by "the ill-treatment of a parcel of boys."[2]

Mr. Moritz, still to use his text for my preachment, also remarks that "the little less than downright, open abuse, and the many really rude things which the members said to each other, struck me much." Very likely. The manners of the House, though on the mend, were certainly not perfect, certainly far off from our present higher standard. Members then even jeered at the looks of a brother member, even at the ungainly body of the Prime Minister. That noble-minded man, Mr. Burke, was thus abusive. He taunted Lord North for "extending his right leg a full yard before his left;" for "rolling his flaming eyes, and moving his ponderous frame."[3] Mr. Pitt, too, whose name is part of England's pride, was as grossly insulted. He was described as standing, "turning up his eyes to the heaven that witnessed his perjuries;" as "tearing out the bowels" of the nation.[4] Examples of this kind need not be multiplied; and Mr. Moritz justly felt that the sting of

[1] Hansard's "Debates" (1840), LIV. 1093.
[2] Parl. Hist. May 25, 1784.
[3] Feb. 5, 1770.
[4] Colonel Barré, May 11, 1773.

these attacks was blunted by the long-established order forbidding direct speech from one member to the other. And Parliament, perhaps, may be right in thinking that angry words thus addressed to the Speaker, and framed according to a set phraseology, do not sound so bad as bad words in the street. For instance, it is not decorous to declare in a debate that an opponent's words are false; but you may deny the truth of those words "in the strongest language the forms of the House allow;" and you may declare indifference to a statement "coming from such a quarter," but not from "such a man." There is, however, one form of attack which angry members may lawfully use, if we interpret an ancient precedent aright. A member may stare in his opponent's face as fiercely as he likes. During January 1642, a Mr. Jesson, an ancient alderman of the borough of Coventry, "who very worthily represented it, started up with much heat" to oppose a bill that endangered the trade of Coventry. "Whereupon Sir H. Mildmay took exception, affirming that the said Mr. Jesson had looked very fiercely upon him when he spoke, and that it was done in an unparliamentary way." The glare in Mr. Jesson's eyes was discussed by the House; but as the Commons' Journals sup-

plied no decision as to looks, no censure passed on that ferocious stare.[1]

I wish I could say that bitter words were no longer heard in the House of Commons; that the slash of sarcasm never strikes along the benches. However wrapped up in the cotton wool of parliamentary decorum, the taunt, the gibe, the cutting speech, still cut and injure all alike. Such words lower those who utter them; they degrade all who hear them.

From what I have said, the House of Commons obviously is no easy place to speak in. Hearers so ready to be rightly moved, so ready to be justly provoked—so quick to feel that words are used to sound fine, not to convey sense—fair, as they are always,—the boldest man may fear to address. A new member, one who utterly failed, and sat down silent, instead of distinguishing himself in debate, has left a vivid picture of his sufferings. It was Lord Guildford, the eldest son of that Lord North who bandied compliments with the dog, that thus described his sensations. "Having risen and caught the Speaker's eye, I brought out," he said, "two or three sentences, when a mist seemed to rise

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal of Long Parliament," quoted from Forster's "Arrest," p. 239.

before my eyes; I then lost my recollection, and could see nothing but the Speaker's wig, which swelled, and swelled, and swelled till it covered the whole House. I then sank back on my seat."[1] And the outside look of an ancient member in this affliction is recorded in the very Journals of the House. According to that authentic document, on the 3d of December, 1601, "Mr. Zachary Lock began to speak, who for very fear shook, so that he could not proceed, but stood still awhile, and at length sat down."[2]

And many are the traditional jokes that cluster round such a point for fun, as the efforts of members who stick fast in speech. "Behold, Sir, another feature of the procrastinating system. Not so the Athenian patriots—Sir, the Romans—Sir, I have lost the clue of my argument—Sir—Sir—Sir, I will sit down."[3] And thus runs another sample of this form of parliamentary oratory: "Mr. Speaker—Sir, I am astonished! Sir, I am astonished! Sir, I am astonished!" What caused this astonishment was never known; for the member was too astonished to go on.

Such a trial as Mr. Lock's tremblings, or such an

[1] "Recollections of Wilberforce," 95.
[2] D'Ewes' "Journal," 666. [3] "The Rolliad," 15.

exhibition as that made by Mr. "Astonished," is no necessity in the career of a member of Parliament. A most able representative may he be, though quite unheard in the House. That "the wisest part of a Parliament are those who use the greatest silence," was the opinion of a statesman in the days of Queen Elizabeth—an opinion not to be scouted now. The shut mouth and eyes wide awake, are no signs of incapacity. And members who steadily watch debates, vote steadily, and steadily hold their tongues, may be proud of their precursor the great historian, Mr. Gibbon, whose tongue was as silent, and whose head was as well stored as any English head will ever be.[1]

Our representatives, then, may be as silent as they please, and still they may be as busy as they like. The life of a member of Parliament cannot be an idle one. There was a member of Parliament, it is said, who paid 20,000*l.* in election costs; represented a county for six or seven years; and only once during those seven years appeared for a moment in the House of Commons. But he lived and died, a hundred years ago; our representatives now cannot be thus neglectful of their duty; and it is an onerous

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 392.

one. To learn the daily practice of the House, they must be familiar with a noted treatise composed of some 800 pages; each page bristles with dates and facts, and maxims of parliamentary lore. To keep pace with the proceedings of the House, members must hunt through piles of papers that fresh and fresh are heaped upon their table—bills, reports, notices, votes, division-lists, &c. &c.; the records of what Parliament has done and is to do. The labours of each session mass themselves yearly into some seventy volumes. And besides deputations, letter writing, and endless calls upon their time, they have to take charge of countless petitions to the House of Commons. These petitions members are bound to examine to see that they are correct, and to vouch each petition with their signature. Upwards of 24,000 petitions thus passed through the members' hands during a single session; and the routine work of Parliament, the committees of inquiry, and the alterations effected every year in the law of the land, demand both study and attention. Besides this, the control of Parliament over private enterprises, such as the supply of water to towns, or the making of railways, creates an immense responsibility. A session or two ago, the private bills in

Parliament ranged over 10,000 closely-printed pages. Service on the private bill committees alone might satisfy a glutton after work; and in this service every member has to share.

Nor can they choose either the time or the quantity of work. The manufactory of law and government at Westminster resembles all manufactories; it must take work as it comes: the press of business in the session is a crush indeed. Members of Parliament are often in committee-rooms from eleven o'clock till four in the afternoon, and then in the House from four o'clock till two o'clock the next morning. The sitting of the House, during much of the session, continues from noonday till far past midnight; and those midnight hours of work are most exhausting. In the year 1860, the Commons worked after twelve o'clock at night during a hundred and fifty hours. This equalled fifteen thorough good working days; for ten hours a day of head-work is as much as the toughest brain can stand; and these fifteen days came at the end of a very busy session. Nor can Parliament avoid this work at night. Men engaged in active business are wanted there; and the evening is the only time such have to spare.

It is curious to notice how the pressure of social

habits has pushed the hour when the House meets for business, later and later. First, six or seven o'clock in the morning were the appointed times—that certainly would not do now; then the House met at nine o'clock. Such late hours as noon for meeting, and six o'clock for parting, were considered grievously unseasonable about two hundred years ago. And good Speaker Onslow, some fifty years later, deplored in bitter terms the laziness of members, who deemed two o'clock in the afternoon to be as early as they could assemble. Four o'clock in the afternoon is now the regular hour when the Speaker takes the chair: and it has been so for about a century.

In one respect, the habits of the House of Commons are improved; it sits far enough into the night, but it no longer sits all through the night. This used frequently to take place. The first rays of sunlight, one April day, striking bright across the House, suggested to Mr. Pitt one of the noblest passages in his speeches.[1] In the year 1783, an important division occurred at half-past eight, not in the evening, but the morning; nor was this an uncommon event. Sir Samuel Romilly, who adorned Parliament about fifty years ago, it is said, met thus

[1] Slave Trade Debate, April 2, 1792.

these untimely habits. In the course of the evening he joined in the debate, went home, went to bed, and rose, keeping to the ordinary hours of society. He then took his walk before breakfast, between seven and eight o'clock, went down to the House, that had been sitting uninterruptedly all night, and voted upon questions which he had discussed some hours before his bedtime.[1] Nor is the fame of that cheery gentleman forgotten who, on a similar occasion, rose to take part in a debate between seven and eight o'clock in the morning. "Mr. Speaker," he said, "I make no apology for rising now to address the House, as seven o'clock in the morning is my usual hour for getting up."[2] And though, happily for our representatives, jest so untimely is impracticable, still the cry of Mr. Doorkeeper, "Who goes home?" is occasionally heard in the lobby between four and five o'clock in the morning—a summons for departure never more welcome.

If the trouble and cost of an election be thought over; when the labour involved by a seat in Parliament is considered — real, hard, dry, long-continued labour — hours late and early, spent in the

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 389.
[2] Harford's "Wilberforce," 100.

hot air of the House, and long hours spent in the close air of a committee-room—Wonder may truly ask, Why should a seat in Parliament be sought after?

That cost is never repaid. For all that trouble, members can receive no money-return. A seat in Parliament is in every respect an unpaid service. The ability and application necessary to acquire distinction in the House of Commons would meet outside its walls with far more profitable return. The pay of the best paid place in the Government is as nothing compared to the profits ordinarily acquired in business. This would be so if the posts open to members of Parliament were held for life; as it is, these places change hands often—no Government keeps in power any length of time. If the money and trouble consumed by a seat in Parliament were invested in commercial industry, such an investment would be beyond measure the most lucrative, even were the investor the Prime Minister himself. Golden gain apart,—in every way, save as a way to get money, great profit is derived from a seat in Parliament.

The House of Commons is a most interesting place. Before it passes yearly every national anxiety. Whatever occupies the attention of this great

empire — be the subject trivial or important, be it the shape of policemen's hats, or the conduct of a war—it appears in parliamentary debates. And this outside life is repeated there within, in the most concentrated and striking shape. A discussion by the House is sure to turn its subject inside out, to disclose the whole nature of every public question. To hear this well done is no sorry amusement; intellectually it is a great gain. The answer I received from an acquaintance struck me. "Why," I asked him, "do you fag away in the reporters' gallery of the House?" "For the sake of what I learn there," was the answer. And, certainly, a review of each year's history, by the ablest men among us, is an admirable mode of study. Nor do passing events merely furnish talk to the House of Commons; the history of our land is transacted in that room; those who sit there share in it, and they see and hear those eminent men whose lives are part of England's glory.

Then, again, the House of Commons overflows with vigorous, bustling life. Its gossip is of first-rate quality. To tell or to hear some new thing, the House is the best place possible. Nor are the new things repeated in Parliament only gossip; tidings

of breathless interest are often heard there. It is from the Government bench beside the Speaker's chair that the ministers of the Crown announce that war is imminent,—that war has broken out,—that peace may be hoped for. Nor do words like these thrill the hearers like mere news. They are uttered by the actors of the occasion—by the ministers who have advised for war or tried for peace; and their words are heard by those who share such vast responsibility. The pulse of Europe, the hearts of all our countrymen, beat in accord with House of Commons news.

Nor need our great political fair be ashamed even of its fun. If amusement, interest, excitement, be rife in the House of Commons, this vitality arises, because it is so thoroughly alive, because it is the source of an empire's power. That is why the days that preface a great division are days made memorable by their intense interest, why the life of a member of Parliament is life indeed. No one else, be he King or Emperor, takes a more free, direct share in the government of a powerful country. When public events knot and gather into some single question, and that question is ripe for decision by the House of Commons, each member by his vote

clearly and distinctly affects the future course of England. His influence is at once written upon the very face of our country.

Contrast such a power with the power of men outside Parliament, however able. The brilliant writer in a newspaper thinks, as he pens his pungent article, full of vivid common sense, that his article will shake his hearers. He may shake them — he may directly change the bias of their politics—still the world gets up and goes about its business as though the newspaper had never thundered. The divine writes a sermon that he feels must breathe new life into his flock. He may touch, he may convert into new creatures many a hearer, but on Monday morning his congregation will wear their week-day faces. The man of science writes a book, which read, colours science for ever; yet the passers before his door look mightily unmoved. But the member of Parliament, by his vote for a free trade fills granaries with corn, the very streets with merchandise; he can by means of public health Acts cleanse populous cities; he can note how pestilence is warded off by measures he has proposed; or he may procure education for thousands of children, who else would die depraved. And, though no member of

Parliament can by law compel the World to be in unison, or force from the drunkard's hand the dram, or make pure the profligate — still he can give his voice for peace; still he can shield the weak from temptation. And votes for purposes such as these quickly bespeak their effect. The prosperity of a nation is a tale intelligible to all — the dawn of material welfare is seen at once.

To influence a nation directly; to be able to touch, to see, to hear of one's influence, is given to few—to none so fully as to a member of Parliament. Thus insensibly, you see, I have been brought before the true cause that gives value to a seat in Parliament. I began with the intellectual pleasure afforded by the parliamentary debates—and that is a real pleasure; then I came to the interest and amusement the House affords—and that is great; and to the excitement of a political contest—and that is most absorbing. These are attractions into Parliament, and they may justly move. But it is the power of the House of Commons that is its true attraction: it is the ablest contrivance for exerting a nation's will ever known. Men may justly wish to wield such an authority, to act with the strength of a strong people.

I have now explained "what is got by going into Parliament;" a question so much in vogue during an election, and that is thought to sound so knowing; a question that is, in fact, an insult by him who asks it, not to the candidate, but to himself. Slices out of public contracts, jobbing with the public funds, sinecures, pensions, have long vanished; these pickings out of the nation's pocket are possible no longer. Profit and gain of this kind is not to be got by going into Parliament. Even such Government posts as are open to members are neither many nor lucrative; they cannot be held without much labour, or be held long. So inveterate, however, is the feeling that a member of Parliament must surely put something into his purse, that an idea that he is paid for sitting on committees is widely current: an idea utterly incorrect.

What is got by going into Parliament, is the satisfaction of a just ambition, of a wish to enjoy the sense of power, and the gratification of a pride very proper to an Englishman, that is highly beneficial to us all.

Our Parliament is the most ancient, the most high-spirited, the most above suspicion, the most powerful of all assembled law-givers in the world.

Do we wish to see this changed? do we wish to see Parliament lose this noble superiority? We shall,—if the nation despises its electoral rights; if men of worth are discouraged from seeking the high trust of a vote in Parliament; we shall if we do not hold in due esteem the House of Commons.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

LECTURE THE SECOND.

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AND THE SERJEANT-AT-ARMS.

Introduction.—Speaker Trevor expelled, March 1695.—Speaker Lenthal affrighted.—Speaker Onslow.—Speaker Norton and George III.—A Speaker's Duties.—A Member "counting" himself out of the House.—The Speaker's Responsibility.—His Casting Vote.—A Prime Minister in Tears.—The Source of the Speaker's Authority.—The Opening of Parliament.—Queen Elizabeth's State Procession, April 2, 1571.—The House of Commons at the Bar of the House of Lords.—Election of their Speaker by the House of Commons.—Mr. Yelverton's Excuses.—The Disapproval of Speaker Seymour by King Charles II.—The Prison Cell of the House.—Breach of Privilege.—How the House of Commons kept up its Dignity.—List of Privilege-breakers punished by the House.—The Reporters' Gallery.—The Battle with the Reporters.—The Newspapers and Parliament.

A THOUGHT may occur to you this evening, that I wish to anticipate. This is the thought,—after all, a connected view of the doings and ways of the House of Commons is not afforded by these lectures.

That is so, true enough. This arises, however, not because I undervalue such information, or because I do not feel the kind encouragement that springs from your presence here again, and from your liberal attention. The reason why my pictures of parliamentary life are disjointed and fragmentary, is this: because I can do no better. An A B C description of that great assembly is impossible in a lecture.

Think merely of the size of my subject, and you will see my difficulty. This evening I propose to describe the duties of the Speaker of the House of Commons. Turning to the text book on the subject, I find that the mere index to his duties occupies 120 lines of close-set printing. Now this index affords a rapid mode of learning what is required of a Speaker. Suppose I read it to you :— 1. "Earliest mention of office." 2. "His rank." 3. "Words of, taken down." What would become of us before I had half done? As for my hearers they, at least, I trust would be asleep. Here, again, is another mode of studying the ways of the House of Commons. This big and goodly book at my feet is the first volume of its Journals. If beginning with page 1, from leaf to leaf, I read up to the last page, the 1055th, where should we be then? Why, "up a tree;" indeed,

so high up the tree of knowledge, that it would be impossible to get down again. And this is but volume I. of the Journals. There are 119 more of these books, each one, if possible, stouter, heavier, and more full of knowledge than his fellows.

A lecturer, in truth, can only picture what he tells, or rather try to picture his story, with the most vivid touches. He must not offer to his hearers any image or view save such as can be placed clear and bold before the mind's eye.

So having accounted for my method in these lectures—an excuse which I trust you will accept—I shall begin my essay on the Speakership, with what is, I think, a very striking picture.

About 200 years ago a strange-looking lad, with face made ugly by a portentous squint, and made yet uglier still by the slippery glance of a knave inveterate, sat at the outer door of a lawyer's office. The lawyer, to account for the presence of this pleasant-featured lad, said, "He is set there to learn the knavish part of the law."[1] Congenial knowledge! The lad soon had it at his fingers' ends; and his knavish cleverness, for he was clever, brought him

[1] Macaulay's "Hist." v. 177. Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," i. 53.

plenty to do. Gamblers' disputes, quarrels over a bet, such queer law questions this lad decided with much ability. Soon he rose to disreputable eminence. As time went on he rose to real eminence. In some thirty years, he mounted from the lawyer's stool to such dignity, that in a national and royal procession, for him was reserved a very distinguished place; and how high was this distinction, you will understand, when you know what this procession was in which he thus appeared. It was the funeral of Queen Mary, the wife of King William III. Her burial took place on the 5th of March, 1695, a day long memorable in London.[1] The Queen had died young; she died beloved. Her death was sudden, almost terrible: she was struck down by malignant small-pox. Public sorrow for Queen Mary was great. Never was so universal a mourning. Constrained by true sympathy, Parliament resolved to follow her body to the grave: never before had Parliament followed a royal funeral. They did so, however: robed in long cloaks of scarlet and black, attended by the maces, the emblems of their dignity, both the House of Lords and the House of Commons came after the hearse, on which was laid the purple velvet-shrouded

[1] Evelyn's "Diary," ii. 333. Kennett's "Hist." iii. 676.

coffin. The streets were hung with black: it was in truth a pageant of unusual solemnity. The whole English nation was represented there, the nobility, the judges, the Lord Mayor, all the authorities, both civil and religious. And walking in this grand procession, between the Peers and the House of Commons, in a space set apart to do him honour, with the mace borne before him and his train carried up, there walked that knavish, squinting lad, now grown into a knavish, squinting man. His name was Sir John Trevor. As Speaker of the House of Commons he took this place. Nor had any of their Speakers before him been thus distinguished as the First Commoner of the realm: no former Speaker had been honoured by heading in a royal procession the whole House of Commons.

Thus was Sir John Trevor, as the First Commoner of the realm, publicly ennobled on the 5th of March, 1695. Within a week, in the eyes of all England, he was a man the lowest and most degraded among Englishmen. This was how it happened. We saw Trevor, on that 5th of March, as Speaker of the House of Commons, leading the House after Queen Mary's coffin. What is it that only seven days later, Trevor had to do as Speaker? Standing in his high place; standing there before all the representatives of Eng-

land, he had to read aloud words to this effect:—"Resolved, that Sir John Trevor, Speaker of this House, for receiving a gratuity of 1,000 guineas from the City of London, is guilty of a high crime."

Thus ended the 12th of March, 1695. And what a day it must have been to Trevor! During all that day he sat in the Speaker's chair, conspicuous, exalted, while his guilt was exhibited in full; there he had to stay, in his post of office, raised aloft, that it might be proved that he, as Speaker of the House of Commons, had taken money to help a bill through Parliament; he was forced to see the papers specifying the day, the cause, the names of the persons who had bribed him, held up before his very face; he had to hear that all read aloud from the beginning to the end.

Then came the fulfilment of that end. Trevor was obliged to stand up, to read aloud, and to put to the vote, that Resolution descriptive of his guilt. His words were quickly answered by shouts of "Ay! ay!" And then, as Speakers do, Trevor had to ask the House if any were of a contrary opinion; but to that question came no answer: it was impossible for any one to say "No." So, as Speaker, he had himself to declare, that he himself had been so base as to take a bribe. It seems strange that any man could endure

the ignominy of such a moment. It was as much as this man could bear. Slippery as was Trevor's nature, he could not escape the grip of that great shame. Had he taken the chair next day, he must have put to the House a vote for his own expulsion. This he avoided; he pleaded illness; another Speaker was chosen. Soon afterwards Trevor was expelled.

Never again — never before — had the Speaker's chair been disgraced, as it was disgraced by Trevor; and the shame was keenly felt by the House of Commons. Yet the members themselves were slow in finding out that they also, in their way, disgraced the high post of their Speaker —and themselves, by want of due respect to the holders of that office. In rude and violent times they behaved rudely to the Speaker. In the time of James I. a member wilfully insulted the Speaker, making faces in his face, and scornfully popping out his tongue at him;[1] nor could the Speaker obtain apology or redress for the gross insult. And Speaker Lenthal, a few years later, while in the chair itself, and before the whole House, was thus made sport of. He was actually putting a question to the vote, when a waggish member came close

[1] "Com. Journ." i. 452.

behind his shoulder, and, "in a loud and violent manner," cried "Baugh! in the Speaker's ear, to his great terror and affrightment," and that of all the members present.[1] And Speakers have been told to keep to the truth—to keep themselves in order; and they have been accused before all the House of open profligacy and obvious unfairness. What a wide difference this shows from our idea of the Speaker of the House of Commons! He is to us, really and truly, the First Commoner in the realm. We know that Speakers receive and command the utmost respect, for we know who they are nowadays.

Nor is it to magnify the Speakers of our time that I quote these samples of parliamentary bad manners, or that I related the story of Trevor's infamy. The high position of the Speaker now, thanks to a long line of noble Speakers, needs no contrast to set it off. I thus began my lecture that I might show how much the Commons owe to that worthy man, the Speaker Onslow. He took the chair when the shame of unworthy Speakers was fresh in public memory; and he raised that post to its present dignity. He asserted, and was able to assert, the true authority of the Speaker; he cleared himself

[1] Verney's "Notes" (Long Parliament), 156.

of every shadow of partiality, even at a pecuniary loss. When elected to the chair, part of his official salary was paid to him by the Government. This was the custom then; but the mere hint that, perhaps, a feeling for his paymaster, the Government, biassed his judgment, made him refuse to receive that salary a day longer. And this lofty conduct Arthur Onslow maintained during five-and-thirty years of official life.

The Speaker never opens his lips in the House, save when called on by his duty. It is an old, old rule, that no Speaker may sway debates by argument. He is called Speaker because he speaks for, not to the House: he is its mouthpiece on all state occasions. In ancient times, he had much to do in this capacity. When the Commons appeared before the Sovereign in the House of Lords, the Speaker, at their head, was wont to pour out profuse, long-winded strains; for four long hours once did a Speaker, as the Commons' mouthpiece, hold forth before King James I. Another, who promised to be a "plain Speaker, fit for the plain matter, and to use plain words,"[1] entertained Queen Elizabeth with an "excellent oration," two

[1] "Parl. Hist." i. 718 (Mr. R. Onslow, Jan. 2, 1566).

whole hours in length. And, as might be expected, so much talk for talk's sake tempted the Commons' mouthpiece often into most offensive flattery. Kings were likened to the good King Hezekiah, to wise King Solomon, or the glorious sun in the heavens—even almost to a God. Honied words such as these once met a fit reproof. Speaker Crooke told Queen Elizabeth that England had been defended against the Spanish Armada by "her mighty arm." To which she answered from the throne, "No; but by the mighty hand of God, Mr. Speaker."[1]

It was the contrary fault that Speaker Norton committed about ninety years ago. He was not, like Speaker Crooke, too servile; he was vastly too rude to his sovereign, King George III. The sole occasion now when Speakers address the Sovereign on the throne, is at the close of a session, when they offer bills granting the Government supplies for the Royal acceptance. To do this, at the end of the session 1777, Speaker Norton presented himself at the bar of the House of Lords. The King was on the throne, and the Speaker as usual began his address; but the style of the address was not as usual. Norton did not assure the King that the

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 601.

people cheerfully opened their purses to supply the Royal wants; on the contrary, the Speaker described to George III. the distress of his subjects—the distress especially of over-taxation—and thus he ended: "In spite of all this, the Commons have granted to your Majesty a great additional revenue—great beyond example, great beyond your Majesty's highest expense."[1]

Though opportunities for oratory are now unfrequent to our Speakers, they still are the mouthpiece of the Commons. When the House presents an address to the Queen, the Speaker leads them to the Palace, and reads to her Majesty the address. He thanks, in the name of the House, those military leaders who have deserved well of their country. The House of Commons never looked grander than when, on the 1st of July, 1814, the Duke of Wellington stood at their bar, to hear his just praises celebrated by Speaker Abbot in glowing words, and to hear the pealing applause with which the members, all standing up, thanked that great soldier for what he had done for us.

In thundering forth the reproofs and censures of Parliament the Speaker's tongue had formerly much to do. And the Speaker's reprimand of a criminal

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. History," i. 203 (2d Ed.).

at the bar of the House is a sight of much solemnity. Just picture to yourselves what you would feel if, in the middle of the night, you were dragged suddenly out of the darkness of the streets, and placed before the glare and tumult of the House of Commons. The rows of benches, rising up high on either side, are crowded; the prisoner is thus hemmed in by walls of faces watching him eagerly. He stands upon the floor trembling; before him is the bar, a metal rail that shuts him off from the tribunal that deliberates on his fate. And by the prisoner stands the Serjeant-at-Arms, holding up in air that sceptre of gilded silver that is called the Mace. In the far distance, at the end of the great hall, raised on high, sits the Speaker, draped in a long gown; in solemn tones he questions the offender; so frightened, indeed, was one poor fellow that he fell down on the floor of the House in a convulsion fit.[1] Then the House directs the Speaker to give his Reprimand; and the prisoner is led away by the Serjeant, with words like these ringing in his ears: "Because you have, in defiance of the law of this country, knowingly and wilfully violated at once the privileges of this House, and the just constitution of Parliament, you are committed

[1] June 11, 1604, "Com. Journ." i. 336.

to the gaol of Newgate, the common receptacle of malefactors, there to remain a prisoner—a signal proof of the power and justice of this House—an indelible disgrace upon you, and a memorable example to others."[1]

The chief duty of the Speaker is to keep order in the House; and it is a most difficult duty. Members do not, indeed, as they did two hundred years ago, "take tobacco" in the House of Commons, and its committee-rooms, as the gentlemen who followed Marlborough to war were wont to do. Nor are nuts and oranges eaten by members on the benches of the House, as was the custom some eighty years ago. Still, they will cross between the member who addresses the House and the Speaker's chair, which is a grave offence. Or they do still worse: they will congregate in noisy clusters and talk and laugh; a bad habit that provoked this remonstrance from an old Parliament man, a subject of Queen Elizabeth: "Mr. Speaker, where is no order, there is disorder; divers gentlemen stand before the door of the House, which breeds a confused sound when the question is propounded. I pray you order them to disperse."[2]

[1] 1805, Speaker Abbot to Sir W. Rawlins, Sheriff of Middlesex.
[2] Dec. 9, 1601. D'Ewes' "Journal," 675.

And the same desire to restore due decorum now calls forth many an "Order! Order!" from the chair; "orders" promptly obeyed,—and as promptly disobeyed. A Speaker of old times remarked, "My chair is no bed of roses;" and his successors must most fully agree with him.

In sober truth, anxiety—constant, ceaseless, ever-pressing—must be the portion of a Speaker of the House of Commons. He has to rule, to guide aright a crowd of 400 or 500 gentlemen, who, though they are gentlemen, yet they are men; often heated with party strife, often vexed by, or vexing each other, always restless, always wanting control.

And part of the Speaker's duty is to keep debate to the question under discussion. Just listen to an illustration, that not long ago took place, of what seems at first sight, an easy task. A resolution was being considered that imposed a duty on silk, and to that subject, the silk duty, the House at first kept steady; when by degrees, insensibly, like the changes in a dissolving view, the duty on silk disappeared, and the Speaker heard, instead, a powerful sermon on the love of money, and on the cowardice of Englishmen, caused by the love of money. This certainly did not touch directly the duty on silk: so back to silk

the Speaker gently recovered the debate. No sooner had he done so, but the debate was off the track again. A member took a lively interest in corks—and corks are taxed as well as silk. He soon was arguing, not about the duty on silk, but touching the duty on "corks squared for rounding;" and the Speaker had to lead the House back from corks to silk, when, for the third time, the debate started off from trade in silk, to trade in general. Everybody that could, joined in; all were agog to discuss the whole question of free trade. But to the duty on silk again the Speaker had to bring back these eager disputants; and, after all his pains, for the fourth time the debate broke away from silk, the appointed subject.[1]

And this is a remarkable feature of the Speaker's office; he has to keep order with no power to compel order; he cannot commit a member to custody, flagrant as may be his conduct; he cannot even order him to quit his place in the House. The utmost punishment the Speaker can inflict is to name a member,—to call him by his name. An indirect rebuke is contained in this ceremony. When the Speaker addresses a member by his name, that very act implies that he has so conducted himself,

[1] Debate, March 2, 1860.

as to cease, for the moment, to be a member of the House of Commons; for there, as you know, the members are never spoken of, or spoken to, save by the title of the seat which they represent. Thus, this distinction is withdrawn from the disorderly member by the Speaker's formal call upon him by his name. At best, however, an indirect rebuke is not much of a punishment; though by an ancient rule then arises "the displeasure of the House." But how the House shows its displeasure, or what is the punishment that attends the naming of a member by the Speaker, the following story explains.

A gentleman often in disorder, often needing the threat of "naming" from the Speaker, at length asked him, "Well, what follows?" The answer he got from the chair was:—"the result of my naming you? The Lord in heaven knows!" An emphatic mode of confessing that nobody did know.[1]

And in many ways is the Speaker left apparently powerless. He may not, for instance, sway the House by argument; so he must, in silence, hear the members agree upon rules of practice which he will have to enforce; and, though he might reasonably object to the framing of such rules, yet he must not

[1] Hatsell, ii. 237.

speak or give any opinion on the subject, though with the rules of the House he, as Speaker, has more to do than anybody else. Nor can he regulate the order of the business. He may see an evening lost by an injudicious arrangement of the evening's work, but he may not interfere. Strong condemnation, even by hisses, followed a suggestion, made as long ago as the days of Queen Elizabeth, that the Speaker should settle the order of each day's proceedings.

The Speaker, again, calls on the debaters in the House. In a hot debate, ten or twelve members pop up simultaneously, eager to be heard. The Speaker, from his high chair, is best able to decide who should speak first, as being the first upon his legs—as being first, as it is called, "in the Speaker's eye." But, after all, his decision may go for nothing, for it is in the power of the House to settle who they will hear. An illustration of this principle is a matter of history. In the year 1782, the American colonies achieved their independence. Our army had been defeated, our succours came too late; all was over. George III., however, obstinate to the last, would not see that all was ended with England's rule over America; and, in Lord North, he had a

[1] Dec. 10, 1601. D'Ewes' "Journal," 677.

Prime Minister willing to obey him at any price. The Commons were resolved to stop the American War, to throw out the King's War Minister; and, after a six weeks' struggle, the King and Lord North had to yield: the Minister, at last, came down to the House to announce his resignation. He hurried in, and rose to speak: and, out of courtesy, the Prime Minister is generally heard at once without question. To be courteous, however, the House was not inclined; they loudly insisted that another member, who had also risen up, should speak first, and that Lord North should give way. He was, however, too skilled in debating tactics to be easily silenced; and directly the motion that the other member be first heard, was proposed, Lord North started up again to speak upon that question. There was no stopping him then; and he immediately cut discussion short by announcing that he and the Government had resigned office.[1]

So entirely, also, does the Speaker depend upon the House for power to exercise his authority, that even if the number of debaters present dwindles down to below the quorum, still he cannot himself take notice of that fact. A quorum of the House

[1] March 20, 1782. Lord Mahon's "History," vii. 141.

of Commons is forty members; if thirty-nine only are there, then it is no House. It should adjourn at once; but though two members only were before him, the Speaker could not interfere; he could not take notice of the fact, he could not stop the business of the House. Thus, if one member proposed a resolution and another seconded it, the Speaker would have to put the resolution to a House of Commons composed only of those two members. The resolution then being, of course, carried unanimously, it would appear upon the Journal, just as if it had been agreed to by the whole body of our representatives, as if it had been voted by 658 members,—and not by two. Such an absurdity never, I need hardly remark, took place.

The Speaker, all the same, has no power to notice that the number in the House has fallen below the needful quorum; the hint must first come from a member. But the hint once given, "a count" of the House must take place, and debate is promptly stopped by the Speaker's cry of "Order! order!" During two minutes the division-bells are set ringing, and the doors of the House are thrown open. Then the Speaker counts the heads upon the benches, and if the required forty members be not present, the

House, debate and all, is closed for that evening. Yet though the Speaker cannot himself begin a count, a very slight touch may set him off. If the number present be in the vaguest manner questioned, the doubt must be immediately settled. This event took place in the House a few years back. About a score of our representatives were giving serious attention to a very serious address, on a very important subject, by a very serious brother member. And had he kept serious to the end, he might have ended his talk. But it was never ended. Vexed by the scanty attendance that listened to his all-important subject, he joked about the crowded benches, the packed House, that he pretended to see around. The jest was fatal; he had referred to the number present; this done, and the Speaker must determine what that number is. "Order! order!" from the chair, silenced the debater. Amazed he sat down, quite ignorant of the effect of his wit,—then the Speaker rose in all solemnity; in due custom he began the regular "One, two, three," as his extended arm pointed in stately circuit to each member. Soon all was over; the two minutes elapsed; but twenty heads were counted, and the House broke up, much in laughter at the luckless orator, who had counted himself out.

Nor may the Speaker, when the evening's work is ended, quit his chair of office, unless his chain be loosened by a friendly member's voice. Without that he cannot leave his place, even though the House be entirely empty. This event also actually took place. In a hurry, at the end of a long evening, all the members disappeared, forgetful of their Speaker. There he remained, fixed in "that ancient seat, the chair of Speakers;" and there he must have sat till this moment, had not a member been fetched back to repeat before him those magic words, "That the House do now adjourn."

Even the silver-gilt mace, the special emblem of the Speaker's authority, does not belong either to the Speakers or the House of Commons. The mace is only lent to Speakers by the Queen, who resumes the loan when Parliament is not sitting.

The power of true authority, however, is not wanting to Speakers of the House of Commons, powerless though they seem. The Speaker has the greater power because he possesses no power. It is because he represents good order without means of compelling order, that he keeps order. For what does his voice do? It reminds the House of Commons that the maintenance of its own dignity is its own duty;

that to become sensible, it must use its own sense. And this sound principle, that the best of help is to make men help themselves, is well illustrated by the practice of the chair. The Speaker is the guardian of the rights and privileges of members, and their adviser on points of practice; if, however, they crave of him an answer to a question they can answer for themselves, firmly and courteously he suggests,—that it is for them to settle their own doubts. And so anxious is the House to assert its own dignity, not to lean on the Speaker's arm, that on great occasions, when the rights and privileges of the Commons are discussed, a solemn judgment from the chair, to clench the discussion, is not asked from him. For instance, in session 1860, the House of Lords threw out a tax-bill. Now it is the most ancient and settled rule that the Commons alone tax the country; that with a tax the Peers have nought to do. It was long and earnestly considered by the Commons, whether or no the Lords had power to reject a tax-bill: it was a question strictly bearing on the rights of Parliament, but during the whole of this discussion, not one public appeal was made for a decision from the Speaker.

Nor was this because the Speaker's opinion would

have had no weight, or is unheeded by the House; his opinion is sought for constantly, and as much outside the House as in it. Daily the Speaker considers in his study points of difficulty; public interposition is thus avoided—the Commons are left to themselves as much as possible.

To sway the heart, to recall the sense of duty, the slightest touch is ever the most effective touch. This is why the Speakers of the House are obeyed implicitly,—it is because they represent order, but cannot compel order; they are thus powerful, because they have no power. The source of the Speaker's authority is in truth an appeal to right reason.

Nor do the Speakers of our day merely represent good order, dignity, and justice; such is their life and conduct, that they are those virtues personified. On their absolute impartiality it seems almost an impertinence to remark. Though party adherents before elevation to the chair, when in it, they become ignorant that the House is necessarily arranged into two hostile ranks. And even when they give their vote in the House, for the Speaker has the casting voice, if the numbers on a division prove equal,—they never give it so as to end the matter in dispute: they always leave, if possible, the question open for another

division. This is the settled practice; yet all the same it is a striking sight to see the occupant of the chair stand up and give his vote upon a hotly-contested matter. Some two hundred years ago, the glare of eyes fixed on a Speaker, expectant of his casting vote, so unnerved him that he stammered out first, "I am an 'Ay;'" then,—"no, no, I am a 'No,' I should say;" a state of puzzlement that provoked laughter, and rude remarks, that "Mr. Speaker was gone."[1] And even nowadays, the moment of the casting vote is always a moment of excitement. In 1861 the Church-rate Abolition Bill had reached its third reading. Long and warm was the dispute over the bill. The division took place. The House was crowded. All were eager for the announcement of the numbers, for it was known that the voting had been very even. Great then was the stir; great, I must say, the amusement, when the numbers proved exactly equal, 274 ayes, 274 noes. "A tie, a tie," was shouted by many amidst noise and laughter. The uproar was quieted; the Speaker rose in his place; and the stillness of the House became almost oppressive, so prevailing was the excitement of the moment. For even though everybody knew that the Speaker would

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," i. 24.

not take on himself to settle the Church-rate question, yet it was impossible to listen to his voice with indifference, or to watch unmoved the one voter decide the fate of the 548 voters.

A Speaker once was driven into a corner,—he found that "Ay" or "No," guilty or not guilty,—must be settled by his casting vote. For the question he had to decide was, whether or no, Lord Melville, as Treasurer to the Navy, had been guilty of official misconduct. It was in the year 1806 that this accusation was brought before the Commons, and it provoked, you may suppose, the utmost zeal and heat. Much was proved against Lord Melville; much, however, of the desire to prove his guilt sprang from party-hate. His accusers may have loved justice, but they certainly also loved to plague an antagonist. The famous Mr. Pitt, George III.'s prime minister, was strong on Lord Melville's side, his friend and colleague; but the opposing party was zealous and powerful. The fierce debate ended with an even vote: 216 members declared for Lord Melville; 216 voted for his guilt. Lord Melville's fate was thus placed in the Speaker's hands: to be decided by that one vote. Yet it was long before the Speaker could give his vote; agitation overcame him; his face grew

white as a sheet. Terrible as was the distress to all who awaited the decision from the chair; terrible as was the Speaker's distress, this moment of suspense lasted ten long minutes: there the Speaker sat in silence — all were silent. At length his voice was heard: he gave his vote, and he condemned Lord Melville. One man at least that evening overcame. Mr. Pitt was overcome; his friend was ruined. At the sound of the Speaker's voice, the Prime Minister crushed his hat over his brows to hide the streaming tears that poured over his cheeks; he pushed in haste out of the House. Some of his opponents, I am ashamed to say, thrust themselves near, "to see how Billy Pitt looked." His friends gathered in defence around, and screened him from rude glances. During a quarter of a century, almost ever since he had been a boy, Mr. Pitt had battled it in Parliament. His experience there was not victory only, but often defeat. This defeat, however, he sank under—it was his last. He died ere many months had passed. The death of that great man was hastened by Speaker Abbot's casting vote.[1]

With patience especially, must the Speaker of the House of Commons be largely endowed. It was

[1] Sir G. C. Lewis, "Administrations of Great Britain," 265.

calculated that whilst the late Speaker, Mr. Shaw Lefevre, held the chair, the House sat considerably more than 15,000 hours. If discussions are to the point, though dull and lengthy, no Speaker may interrupt. There has been a Speaker who, weary of the long debate, was wont to shout out lustily, "I am tired,—I am weary,—I am heartily sick of this."[1] Such outbursts of impatience were not heard by any now alive, I need hardly tell you. Nor was it even poor Speaker Onslow who thus gave way during that long debate, when he sat in the chair for seventeen hours at a stretch.[2]

The election of a Speaker by the House of Commons, and the ceremony by which Parliament is opened, occur together in reality; so these events shall be coupled together in my lecture. And, trusting to your fellow-feeling with the pleasure I take, in linking the Parliament of to-day with Parliaments of years ago, I shall venture to turn your thoughts back in time some three hundred years. Helped by the descriptions of eye-witnesses,[3] I propose to substitute for Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, in my

[1] Speaker Norton. Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. History," 503 n. (2nd Ed.).

[2] Report: Office of Speaker (1853), 11, 12.

[3] D'Ewes' "Journal," 58, 97, 136, 312.

narrative of the ceremony that calls Parliament to work. It is begun by the State Procession.

On Monday, April 2, 1571, the Parliament beginning, the Queen's Highness, our most gracious Sovereign, the Lady Elizabeth, about eleven of the clock, left her palace at Whitehall. And thus she made her ancient, accustomed, most honourable passage along the road towards Westminster. First came her Majesty's Guard of State; then the knights, bannerets, and esquires; her judges, justices, barons, bishops, archbishops, earls, viscounts; the officers of her Court, her Majesty's Great Seal of England, the gilt Rod of Royal State, the golden-sheathed Sword and the jewelled Cap of Maintenance, the emblems of the realm's authority, attended by heralds, pursuivants, and trumpeters. Thus the ministers of justice, of religion, and of government followed in solemn order, one after the other. And as the procession passed along, the music of the trumpeters filled the ear; the eye was caught by the blaze of scarlet and gold, by the gleam and glitter of white steel, white surplices, and white miniver; for all were vested in their Parliament robes, their mantles, circots, and hoods. Then came the Queen—the Queen Elizabeth.

Her Majesty sat in her coach, robed imperially, in

a mantle furred with ermines, and her kirtle of crimson velvet, cut close, with close sleeves. Over all was a collar, richly set with jewels; and upon her head a wreath or coronet of gold gleaming with pearls and precious stones. The palfreys of her coach were covered with crimson velvet, richly embossed and embroidered. Her chariot was followed by the Master of the Horse, leading Her Majesty's spare horse, and by forty-seven Ladies and Women of Honour, the Guard, in gold-laced coats, going on every side of them; the trumpeters before them sounding, and the heralds riding,—all keeping their rooms and places, orderly.

Her Majesty being thus conducted with royalty into the Upper House of Parliament, and apparelled in her Parliament robes, there she sat in princely and seemly sort, under a high and rich canopy, her mantle borne up from off her shoulders by the Lord High Chamberlain, and the Lord Hunsdon.

Having placed Queen Elizabeth on her throne, we must now look round the Parliament House. The Lords, spiritual and temporal, all in their places, sat ranged in order due, and the judges on the woolsacks in the midst. Notice, then, that the Queen was on the throne, was given to the knights,

citizens, and burgesses of the House of Commons. They, thereupon, repairing to the Parliament House, as many as conveniently could, were let in; and stood together, behind the rail or bar, at the lower end of the Upper House. Her Majesty then rose up from her Regal seat, and with a princely grace and singular good countenance, spake a few words thus: "My right loving Lords, and you our right faithful and obedient subjects, we, in the name of God, for His service, and for the safety of this State, are now here assembled, to His glory I hope; and I pray that it may be to your comfort, and the common quiet of our, yours, and all ours, for ever."[1]

Then looking on the right side of her, towards the Lord Chancellor, she willed him to show the cause of the Parliament. Thereupon the Lord Chancellor spake, and "declared in Her Majesty's name that this Assembly of Parliament was for three causes called; namely, for the glory of Almighty God, for the health and preservation of her Majesty, and the welfare of the common weal." Which after that he had most eloquently at large declared,—turning his speech unto the House of Commons, "standing on a heap together below," the Lord Chancellor willed

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 137.

them to make choice of "one to be a mouthpiece unto them, which is called the Speaker; Therefore," he said, "go and assemble yourselves together, and elect one, a discreet, wise, and learned man, to be your Speaker."

This "accustomed pompous and royal manner" in which the Queen "of glorious memory" made her "passage" to Westminster, closely resembles the state procession with which our Queen—a Queen not less beloved—now opens Parliament. Queen Victoria, indeed, certainly does not wear the same "kirtle of crimson velvet," with "close sleeves," that covered Queen Elizabeth's neck and arms; nor do fifty Ladies of the Court walk behind her carriage in the street. Still, like Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria is preceded by the officers of her Household and the Ministers of her Government, and she is unattended by military display; her carriage unsurrounded by soldiers is guarded, like Queen Elizabeth's, only by her subjects' love.

And the same errand precisely brings both Queens to Westminster. For now, as then, Parliament cannot commence business till told to do so by the Sovereign. Thus it has been since our Parliaments have existed. And equally unremitting has been Parliament's protest

against the Sovereign's absolute control. For many a century, as it is now, the first step taken by the House of Commons at the beginning of every session is to read a bill the first time. And for this sole object; the bill, indeed, is a sham, but its reading is put foremost to prove Parliament's inherent right to redress the grievances of the people first of all, before taking into consideration the wishes of the Sovereign. And most strictly is this form still observed; though now, happily, it is nothing but a form, for subjects and sovereigns are no longer hostile parties in the State.

The description, also, of the House of Commons standing crowded "in a heap," behind the bar of the House of Lords, to hear Queen Elizabeth, exactly tallies with what is witnessed by Victoria. As they did 300 years ago, just in the same way now members of Parliament summoned to hear the Royal Speech rush into the House of Lords and crowd into the space below the bar, pushing on in the same tumultuous, uncomfortable style. Solemn as is the occasion—the sight of the House of Commons jostling, tumbling, almost head over heels, into the House of Lords—is a sight so comic, as to have provoked a smile even from the Queen herself.

This feature in the opening ceremony of Parliament must strike you as odd. The only place where the Commons hear the Royal Speech is a narrow pen, shut off from the House of Lords by a bar or high railing. It is only from the lower end of that hall, at the furthest possible distance from the throne, that they are allowed to appear in the presence of the Queen: nor do they even sit in this pen; but stand there in the most awkward way, treading on each other's feet, and crowded together. Still more odd does this appear, considering that the space allotted to the Peers is most ample—that they sit to hear the Royal Speech, in stately robes, as dignified as dignified can be.

Now it is most proper that the Peers should receive all honour due, and occupy the easiest of cushions; but the post of humble suppliants, standing behind a rail, hardly accords with our notions about the House of Commons. So strictly, however, is it, that we stick to what is "as heretofore accustomed," even though the custom be an inconvenient one.

Three hundred years ago "the heap" below the bar, into which the Commons of England massed themselves, tallied every way with their position in the State. That contrast between the Commons standing humbly below, and the Lords sitting lordly above,

did mirror forth the inferiority of the Commons, the superiority of the Lords, and the exact relation in power of the Upper House, the Peers, with the Lower House, the Commons. My wish it is, that this "heap" upon the floor of the House of Lords may be seen at least three hundred years longer. For what is higher or lower amongst friends? The Houses of Lords and Commons are, and should be friends, and the Nation friends to both. Content with actual strength, the Commons may well endure, without a grumble, this humble place on the floor of the House of Lords.

The first day of a Parliament is also marked by another feature, which shows the ancient control of the Sovereign over the House of Commons. It cannot act without the Speaker to guide its councils, yet the choice cannot be made without the Sovereign's express leave.

Obeying, then, the Royal command, the House of Commons proceed to elect their Speaker. The usual course is for a member distinguished by long experience to suggest who, in his opinion, is most suitable for the chair; and, if no one else be proposed, the election to the speakership passes by acclamation. This is not always the case; the choice

of Speaker has been occasionally the subject of long and hot debate. Out of the ten Speakers chosen during the last hundred years, the election of seven was carried by a division, not by unanimous consent. The election completed, the Speaker-elect rises, and makes due acknowledgment of the high honour imposed on him, and of the great responsibility he assumes. In old times, in days when formal ceremony prevailed, Speakers-elect were wont to protest, with sham modesty, their unfitness for the chair, and to pray the House, with sham earnestness, to place another there instead; and though it took place long ago, let us suppose that Parliament is met for the session of 1597, and that an honourable member, rising in his place, recommends the House of Commons to elect their Speaker. To fill that place of dignity, "in his opinion (here he stays a little), he thinks, that wise, learned, religious, and faithful man, Mr. Serjeant Yelverton (looking upon him), is the fittest man to be preferred," at which words Mr. Yelverton blushed, put off his hat, and sat bare-headed. Thereupon the whole House consents, crying, "Ay! ay!" So after a little pause and silence, Mr. Yelverton rises up, and, a very humble reverence made, speaks, in effect, thus

much: "Your Speaker ought to be a man big and comely, stately and well-spoken, his voice great, his carriage majestical, his nature haughty, and his purse plentiful. But, contrarily, the stature of my body is small, myself not so well-spoken, my voice low, my carriage of the common fashion, my nature soft and bashful, my purse thin, light, and never plentiful."[1] His self-abasement ended, Mr. Yelverton was, of course, installed in the chair, "the ancient seat of Speakers."

Here, again, the supremacy of the Crown over Parliament reappears. Before a Speaker can act, he has to ask and to receive the Sovereign's approval. This approval has been given almost always—but not quite always; it was refused by King Charles II. to the proudest of his subjects. This was Sir Edward Seymour. At the opening of the new Parliament of 1678, the Commons unanimously chose him for their Speaker. Seymour was personally obnoxious to the King, yet confident that King Charles dared not refuse him acceptance as the Commons' Speaker—knowing that the Royal approval had never before been positively withheld—Seymour presented himself at the bar of the House of Lords, to fulfil that

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 549.

ancient ceremony. He was, as I said, more haughty than any Peer—the haughtiest man alive. And if rank and distinction, and if great wealth and much ability might make a man proud, he might be proud like Seymour. And his look asserted all the pride he felt; disdain glittered in his eyes; and with assurance as undaunted, he thus spoke to the King, standing before him behind the bar of the House of Lords: "I am come hither for your Majesty's approbation." In such a style no Speaker had ever addressed a King. To declare that they could hardly stand in the King's presence; that they were ready to faint with fears; to beg with mock humility that they might be freed from a post too high for them—such was the customary fashion for Speakers to sue for the Sovereign's approval. But, for the first time, excuse or apology was dropped; Seymour, for the first time on such an occasion, assumed that, of course, the King would give his leave, and that, of course, he should ably act as Speaker. Beaten, however, even by Seymour's unusual arrogance, the King was not. He would not give his consent; Seymour was sent away, no longer Speaker of the House of Commons. Most indignant were they with King Charles: the Commons addressed him three times over with angry

remonstrance. In vain ; the only answer they could get was,—that this was all loss of time ; the Sovereign's right to annul their choice of a Speaker was undoubted, and the Commons had to yield.[1]

In that bright and splendid building the Houses of Parliament, where all is handsome and comfortable, there exists a kind of accommodation of which perhaps you are unaware. Among the five hundred rooms of that vast Palace, besides committee-rooms, libraries, and dining-rooms, there are prison-rooms ;—downright and absolute cells, with bolts and bars and guarded windows ; and the gaoler is the Serjeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons. So little is the penal authority of the House in sight now, that it may well be out of mind altogether. Yet this power the Commons have, and always have had ; they can arrest and imprison, either in their own cells, or in Newgate, or in the Tower of London, offenders who break the privileges of Parliament, the rules and orders of the House.

Of what event in the history of the House of Commons is to-day the anniversary ? Their punishment of a London milkman. For the almanack

[1] Macaulay's "Hist." ii. 91. Sir T. Erskine May's "Parliamentary Practice" (6th Ed.), 186.

tells me that I have now the honour of addressing you on the 9th of December 1868, and exactly this day, one hundred years ago, 9th of December 1768, the House of Commons sent for, committed, and imprisoned in Newgate, a milkman. This was his crime: he had pasted upon a post in Bond Street a placard, intending thereby—so the House of Commons solemnly resolved—to "inflame the minds of the people" against Parliament.[1] This terrible placard, apparently, was a harmless political squib; but, suppose that it was really noxious and inflammatory, you will ask, why did not the Commons leave the offending milkman to punishment by law? And if the placard meant no mischief, why did not the House leave the milkman alone? Neither way suited the Commons then: their object was to keep up the dignity of Parliament. Nor was the milkman's fate at all singular in 1768; for many a long year did the House arrest and imprison people who offended them.

And when on this wrong track, the Commons did many an odd thing for dignity's sake—odd, I mean, when looked at with the eyes of 1868, and not of 1768, or 1668. Year after year, or rather month

[1] "Com. Journ." xxxii. 97.

after month, London saw, either fronting Westminster Hall door, or before the Royal Exchange, stacks of pamphlets, books, or sermons, heaped ready for the burning; and by the piles of paper there stood the common hangman, with his flaming torch ready to begin the blaze; and near at hand also stood the city crier proclaiming,—such are the orders of the House of Commons. The officers of the Serjeant-at-Arms, and magistrates, and constables too, would be drawn up around, to see execution performed upon the books: for if the mob was not well pleased with the doings of Parliament, they were wont to rush in; to upset the hangman; to kick the books out of the flame, and carry them off in triumph. Many has been the riot round the hangman's book bonfire. And what is the object of this ceremony? these are seditious books burnt by Order of the House of Commons. Nor did any writing, however foolish, escape their scrutiny. One man wrote a treatise proving, or rather pretending to prove, that men have no souls; that belief in the human soul was a heathenish invention:[1] and another man wrote a book to prove that death was an absurd weakness, and that if we had but pluck enough, we might live for

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 195.

ever.[1] And the Commons were straightway on the stir to punish, and to send to Newgate, the inventors of such absurd nonsense.

On sermons, too, the Commons then kept a watchful eye. So watchful, that a clergyman, who slandered in his pulpit the memory of the noble-minded Queen Elizabeth, and of that true patriot, Mr. Hampden, was sent for even all the way from Bristol, and handed over to the Serjeant-at-Arms.[2] And while on the hunt after erroneous politics in the pulpit, the members fell into this absurd blunder; they proposed that the hangman should burn a sermon for which they had themselves given solemn thanks. Actually it was not a hundred years ago when this took place. A sermon preached before the House of Commons in St. Margaret's, the church that stands close by Westminster Abbey, is an uncommon event now. But it used to be the regular custom two or three times every session; and, like many regular customs, the sermon became a regular form. The sermon was preached, and thanked for, and printed by order of the Commons, but heard only by three or four members and the Speaker.

So it was in January, 1772—Dr. Nowell preached

1 Asgill's case, 1707. "Com. Journal," xv. 474. 2 Dec. 24, 1680.

his sermon; and first he was, in due course, thanked by vote of the House of Commons; this vote was entered on the Journals; the House also requested Dr. Nowell to print and publish his discourse. He did so, and the members were straightway in a storm. They were indignant to find that their own preacher had preached to them political opinions utterly subversive of their very House itself, and doctrine flat against all constitutional and parliamentary government. Enraged, the House was in the act of ordering the sermon to the hangman, that he might burn it at Westminster Hall door, when, fortunately for their credit, some one remembered that the pages they condemned were printed by their own Order, and that they had thanked the clergyman for that excellent discourse. The sermon was not burnt, as you can fancy.[1]

That was a wise man who said, "I always button up my pockets, to save them from being picked, when people come to me boasting about their honour." And equally the House of Commons, when it boasted most of its honour, was most specially unjust and arbitrary. About 2 centuries ago it gave sad proof of the ferocity engendered by limitless power:

[1] "Parl. Hist." xvii. 246, 312.

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for the sentences pronounced by the House are not restricted by law or statute. A poor man, in idle talk, indulged in a scoff at the Protestant religion. Enraged, the Commons ordered him to be dragged to and fro the streets of London, with hands tied, and an insulting notice stuck on his back. This was done to provoke against the victim of their cruelty the fury of the mob. For two whole days he was thus exposed to blows and insults, to brutal treatment, if not to actual death.[1]

To sneer at the House of Commons merely in the slightest way was dangerous: how dangerous, I can give an exact illustration. Suppose now good Queen Bess to be on the throne, and not good Queen Victoria; and suppose that a good and loyal subject of her Majesty, such as any one of you might be, were to venture on the following harmless bit of fun. You whisper about Reigate that the House of Commons is much disturbed in mind about the present style of ladies' hairdressing; that a bill is passing to regulate the size, weight, and colour of those large and lovely chignons that delight our eyes. Such a joke might not be very wise now: it would have been decidedly foolish in ancient times. For what would happen to

[1] Floyde's Case, "Com. Journ." i. 596, Session 1621.

you? Shortly the town of Reigate would be in a stir. In the market-place is seen the Serjeant-at-Arms, begirt with his sword, shouldering the mace, and holding a warrant under the Speaker's hand. And before the Serjeant would come the Mayor of Reigate; the Mayor would come trembling, were he as big a man as—anybody. And we should all tremble too; the town would gladly pack off the slanderer of the House of Commons. So the Serjeant trots off the jester about chignons to Westminster; he soon finds himself quaking at that bar, kneeling upon the floor, stammering forth humble apologies. And the Speaker would rate him soundly, he would have to spend days in imprisonment, and be a pretty sum out of pocket.

This is a fancy picture now, but it was no fancy to poor Mr. Thrower, a very inconspicuous inhabitant of London 310 years ago. He was punished for "certain evil words" against the dignity of the House of Commons. And what were these evil words? He had uttered this "slighting joque," that the Commons would dispute and divide upon a bill to regulate the fashion of ladies' caps, which were composed of white linen, curiously peaked up above the head by wires some four or five inches long. If Mr. Thrower is to

be believed, he never said anything about the bill for ladies' cap wires. Even at the worst, the jest was not his own, but one that he had picked up.[1]

Thinking of Mr. Thrower's fate, I almost tremble for myself, for I too have committed this offence, and have passed on to you that, his "slighting joque." But did the worst happen, still I see a chance of escape should I find myself solemnly arraigned before the House of Commons. I shall turn to p. 639 of their own Journal, as edited by "that eminent member of Parliament, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Baronet," printed in the year 1693, and read aloud the following case :—

On Monday, 16th of November, 1601, Mr. John Baker was doing his duty, in his proper state of life, as a lawyer's clerk in Westminster Hall, when the Serjeant-at-Arms pounced on him, and dragged him upstairs to the House of Commons. Swift was the hand of justice then : Mr. John Baker had been denounced there but a few minutes before. A member had risen in his place, and thus he solemnly addressed the Speaker :—" Mr. Speaker," said he, " I think myself bound in conscience to certifie you of an infamous libel " against this House, "that is newly printed and spread abroad ; saving your presence, Mr. Speaker, it

[1] April 15, 1559. "Com. Journ." i. 59.

is called 'An Assembly of Fools.'" And the indignant member desired that the printer of the book, or anybody who had got it, should be pulled up for the offence. The printer lived in the City, but it seemed certain that Mr. John Baker had got the book, and that very likely he was hard by in Westminster Hall. So in haste, to make sure of their prey, the Serjeant was sent to look for him. Astonished, Mr. Baker must have been; but he answered the call readily. He stood at the bar, and handed over the book, which, "saving Mr. Speaker's presence," styled the House of Commons "An Assembly of Fools." The members perused the "infamous libel," and found it to be "a meer Toy, and an old book, and a thing both stale and foolish." So the fussy member "was well laughed at;" and when the Speaker proposed that Mr. Baker should be immediately discharged, all "cryed 'Yea, yea!'"

Besides inflicting punishment for sedition, or libels, to keep up their dignity the Commons took a more effectual course. They protected themselves, and their own property, and their servants, and the property of their servants, from distraint or arrest. All law proceedings against members of Parliament or their servants were immediately stopped, and those who

brought the suits themselves thrown into prison. Thus, members needed not, as other men did, to obey the commonplace duty of paying their just debts; and the following story proves their complete freedom in this respect. It is said that a large estate was left to one Mr. Asgill, and that the condition of the will was that Mr. Asgill should promise not to pay a single penny of the debts which the owner of that property left behind him. Mr. Asgill was a fit man for such a legacy—he was an impudent knave. He fulfilled the will; he took possession of the property, and refused to discharge the debts which the owner of the property had incurred. What is more, Mr. Asgill called the creditors together to insult them. He read out to them the will, told them that he would obey it to the letter, that he intended to cheat them of their due; and that, as he was a member of Parliament, he could so cheat them. And so he did.[1]

This was bad enough; but worse took place. A member of Parliament actually pretended that people were his servants falsely, to save them from justice. Doings like these, you must remember, happened years and years ago, and have long ceased,

[1] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 127.

and ceased entirely. I only mention these things to show the injury that arises when once the right track is quitted; and truly grievous was that injury.

A foreign lady, for example, married an Englishman of some wealth; and she had, unfortunately, to take law proceedings against her husband. He was a man of property—his income was 2,000*l.* a year—but he would not pay his wife what he owed her. The court of law declared the debt to be just; she was compelled to enforce her claim by arrest; and then her husband turned round against her. He had the audacity to pretend that he was a menial servant in the household of a member of Parliament; and the pretence had its effect, no one dared to arrest him, as it would be a breach of parliamentary privilege to do so. The evidence that this gentleman was the menial servant of a member of Parliament was clear enough; he held a protection from arrest, signed by a member of Parliament, one Colonel Wanklyn. This paper was drawn up in the grandest style: it was addressed to all "sheriffs, under-sheriffs, gaolers, bailiffs, constables," and threatening them with the vengeance of the House of Commons if they arrested his servant, this rich man—gentleman I will not call him—of 2,000*l.* a year. Defeat of justice like that

was beyond endurance. The House of Commons, in a just fit of indignation, immediately expelled such an unworthy member as Colonel Wanklyn; and he was led out of the House weeping for shame.[1]

As party-spite might provoke the arrest of a member, it is right that he should be protected while in Parliament from imprisonment for debt. This is an essential and just privilege; yet, like all the powers of the Commons, it is an affair of growth. At first, they had great difficulty in asserting it; for, when once locked up, it was not easy to get members out of gaol. One Sir T. Shirley, in the time of James I., found himself in the Fleet Prison on account of an unpaid debt. The Commons sent for the gaoler: he refused to part with Sir T. Shirley's body; so the Commons locked up the gaoler in the Tower of London. Still he continued obstinate; and, as the gaoler by his obstinacy increased his contempt to the House, the House voted to increase his punishment. They put him into "Little Ease," the most "loathsome dungeon" in the Tower, a narrow recess where he could neither lie down, nor stand up, or sit, or rest at all, except crouching doubled up. "Little

[1] "Com. Journ." ix. 430.

Ease" was the suitable name for this his dungeon. And, besides attacking Mr. Gaoler of the Fleet, the Commons attacked Mrs. Gaoler too. Against her, though her husband was in prison, and she was thus left "without guide or counsel," they sent the Serjeant-at-Arms. So he came to the Fleet Prison, and demanded of her the keys, and the release of Sir T. Shirley. Again the Commons were baffled, for Mrs. Gaoler protected herself, and the keys too, in the best way she could. She kept them in her hand, she threw herself on the ground,—and screamed and screamed. The Serjeant, of course, "desisted, having no commission to use violence." So, after all, the Commons had to ask the King to get the knight out of prison.[1]

The power of the House in defence of breach of privilege, however, soon grew apace; and, in the next reign to James I.—that of his son, Charles I.—this was truly remarked about the Commons:—"The Parliament men are as great princes as any in the world. Whatsoever they please is privilege of Parliament, whatsoever they dislike is breach of privilege."[2] These are the words of that Sussex

1 "Com. Journ." i. 209, &c.

2 Selden's "Table Talk" (Edition 1860), 208.

worthy, Mr. Selden; and when you hear the list of offenders and offences that the House of Commons has punished, I think you will agree with him.

This is the list of privilege breakers. There, kneeling before the bar of the House, have been seen as culprits,—poets, ploughmen, peers, hackney-coachmen, ministers of the Government, widows, bishops, pages, lawyers of all sorts, the Lord Mayor of London and many City aldermen, clergymen of all degrees, sheriffs, bailiffs, the milkman, authors, printers, newspaper editors, and publishers.

For jostling against a member of Parliament, for taking his cloak, for bolting off with his coach and horses, for striking his servant, for snaring his rabbits, tearing his rabbit-nets, lopping his trees, ploughing up his warrens, fishing his fishponds, carrying off his sheep, and, lastly, carrying off a dead body. This extraordinary breach of privilege must be explained. A member, as executor to a will, was arranging the funeral of his dead friend. A quarrel arose in the family, they took possession of the corpse, that they, and not the executor, might manage the burial. So he put his privileges in force; and he got the House of Commons to send their Serjeant and his messengers "to make diligent search for the said corpse, to the

end that the said member of Parliament might decently inter the same."[1]

How times change—how, century after century, wisdom wears a different face! We see plain enough that the House of Commons best maintains its dignity by sticking to its work, by saying nothing about its dignity. We can barely deem that the manly, dignified House of Commons of to-day, can bear any relationship to that fussy old woman of a House of Commons that took care of rabbits and fishponds, and sent its messengers to watch over a dead body. When we turn to the "Paradise Lost," the glory of English poetry, and to "Robinson Crusoe," the delight of our childhood, it is difficult to believe that the Commons ever haled before them, and persecuted as criminals, the poet Milton and Daniel Defoe.

All these powers of oppression are, I need not say, gone utterly; members of Parliament can no longer protect themselves, or anybody else, from payment of their just debts. They had also the right of sending letters post free, a privilege that saved business men in Parliament some 900*l.* a year,[2]

[1] Dec. 12, 1661. "Com. Journ." viii. 331.
[2] Hansard's "Debates." (Feb. 26, 1830.)

but this also has been taken away. Even the gratification of seeing criminals kneel humbly at their bar, is now denied to members of the House of Commons. The neck of this custom was broken by a Mr. Murray, in February 1750. He was brought up to receive the censure of the House for a breach of privilege, and he continued standing; he was ordered to hear the sentence kneeling, and he continued standing; the members begged him to kneel, but he continued standing; the Speaker roared out, "On your knees, sir, on your knees!"—Mr. Murray kept his feet. So he continued standing to the end; though his insolent audacity was voted a high contempt; though he was sent to Newgate, debarred from sight of friends, and even from correspondence by writing. Here the power of the House ended. Mr. Murray was set free by the prorogation of Parliament after four months of captivity; but he had ere long to fly the country to escape further persecution.[1] Yet no one, ever after, was compelled to kneel at the bar of the House of Commons.

A great change you see has come over the House of Commons; and whence arose this change? Partly it sprang from an altered tone in society. Especially,

[1] Knight's "London," ii. 95. "Com. Journ." xxvi. 32.

however, is it the presence of a few unknown strangers, who have done this work; and who sit in the House without its leave, who might be driven away any moment. You can guess who these strangers are —they are the newspaper reporters.

Across the end of the House, above the Speaker's chair, runs a gallery; partitions of little cells divide it. In each cell sits a busy worker, pen in hand, jotting down words at the rate of 100 a minute. Such severe labour cannot be long maintained. Behind each cell sits another worker, ready to relieve the penman in front, ready to drop into his place, to catch up the thread of words where the other leaves it. Thus all the evening these gentlemen appear and disappear, turn and turn about; and when they disappear, they betake themselves to a large room upstairs; and there their pens renew the race. they rattle over paper, transcribing for the printer the shorthand characters in which they took down the speeches in the House. And between this room and the newspaper printing offices is ceaseless intercourse. Relays of messengers leave it every ten minutes, or even every five minutes, one after the other, to race with the "copy" transcribed there, up Fleet Street to the printing offices; hundreds of compositors are set-

ting up the type; myriads of sheets of paper lie ready to circulate the words of Parliament throughout the empire. So ceaseless, so regular, is the chain of communication from the gallery behind the Speaker's chair to the printing offices, that, if the speech be long, its opening words are in type before the end of the speech is dropped from the debater's mouth.

And what are the duties discharged by the Reporters' Gallery in the House of Commons? On behalf of the nation it watches the Parliament; on behalf of Parliament it disperses through the nation the words and thoughts of Parliament. It acts also as Parliament's historian, recording for the use of future sessions an authentic story of each year's deliberation.

Task so important; industry so ceaseless; an organization of workers so complex and complete:—surely such a system for watching Parliament; for spreading its influence far and wide, morning after morning without break or pause, must be a system created, and managed solely by the power of the Government, or controlled, at least, by Parliament? Not a bit of it; the newspaper reporters are technically and truly "strangers" to Parliament. Parliament could not command their services; Parliament does not pay them a penny; Parliament does not

revise a word of what they write. The only control Parliament has over the newspaper reporters is to order them to be off. Every word they write is a "breach of privilege."

The House of Commons, at first, could only see in the reporter a spy: to be watched on behalf of their constituencies was for many years odious to our representatives. The House did everything it could to silence the newspapers. Printers, and publishers, and reporters were had up to the bar, in batches of half-a-dozen, to be reprimanded there, or committed to custody; and before release, abject apology on their knees was always extorted.

As the last century grew older, year after year the nation's demand to hear what was said by Parliament grew stronger. The reporter would not be shut out. He hid himself in obscure corners of the strangers' gallery, and lurked behind the great clock-case in the old House of Commons. In haste he jotted down, under his hat, fragments of the speeches; then, perhaps, he was discovered and driven from the gallery. Undaunted, he went on with his task; he picked up scraps of the debate from friendly hearers; he eked out those scraps of news with gossip in the lobby.

Thus stored with pieces of the debate, the reporter retired to a coffee-house, there to thread together, in haste, the story of that evening in Parliament.[1] At best, however, he had but shreds and patches of the discussion; and to spin these into a connected story, to clothe them with suitable language, the help of some poor scholar was sought for. He gave to that outline of the debate a look of life and reality.' And great was the semblance of reality if an able man undertook that task. Conversation, it is said, once ran on a speech in Parliament, remarkable as a display of a statesman's power. But it was not a statesman's speech: the celebrated Dr. Johnson was in the room,—"that speech of Mr. Pitt's," he said, "I wrote in a garret."

This warfare between Parliament and the printer continued long: for years the public were denied the right of reading a full narrative of the House of Commons' debates.

Nor was the reporter guiltless of provocation. The members plagued him; he plagued them in return. One mode of his annoyance was to fasten on them nicknames and bad names in the newspapers: one member was called the "great scoundrel," another the "little scoundrel," or "a paltry insect," or even

1 Knight's "Shadows of Old Booksellers," 175.

that "curse of the country."[1] The reporters also mangled the speeches of those they disliked, or slipped into them comic passages. For instance, this absurdity was put into the mouth of a member of Parliament, small in stature but great in fame, this jest was fathered even upon Mr. Wilberforce. The reporter made him lament to his brother-members, that. when a child enough potatoes were not given him; and this was Mr. Wilberforce's reason: "For potatoes, Mr. Speaker, potatoes, Sir, make men healthy; potatoes make men tall. More especially do I feel this, because being under the common size, I must ever lament that I was not fostered under that genial vegetable, the potato."[2]

And how was it that the newspaper reporters got seated in that gallery? it was by force of ridicule: the members were shamed and laughed into allowing them permission to report. First of all, in their persecution of the reporter, both Houses of Parliament made themselves ridiculous. The Peers were so hot to keep reporters out of their chamber, that they rudely expelled also members of the House of Commons. In a rage, as a return, the Commons

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." i. 425, 435 (2d Edition).
[2] Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 452.

drove away every Peer that came to hear their debates. Then the Lords retorted by still greater rudeness; they insulted even the Commons' Speaker himself: any member who ventured to stand at the bar of the House of Lords was driven away with shouts of "Withdraw! withdraw!" Thus Lords and Commons hit each other, not the reporter: the laugh was with him. Then the citizens of London joined in the fun. When Serjeant's messengers came there from the Commons, to drag before the House the newspaper printers, both messengers and their errand were treated as a joke—they had to return from the City without the captives. The Lord Mayor also took the popular side; he found an excuse for locking up the messengers of the House of Commons. In retort, the Commons despatched the Lord Mayor himself to the Tower of London. But the Lord Mayor's imprisonment was converted into a triumph; his progress to the Tower was as a Royal progress, through rows of enthusiastic admirers. This was not much of a punishment; again the laugh was with the newspapers.[1]

And in the House itself ridicule was thrown

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." i. 418, 429 (2d Edition). "Com. Journ." xxxiii. 679.

over the contest between the Commons and the reporters. Edmund Burke, a man famed as Dr. Johnson's friend, himself most eminent, took up their cause. He could not prevent the House from committing printers to custody; but he made the proceeding look absurd—he made members sick of the job. For twelve long hours—from 5 o'clock one afternoon till 5 o'clock next morning, by twenty-three divisions, by farcical motions, by jest, by every kind of absurd proposal, did Burke delay and make contemptible the attempt to silence the newspapers.[1]

Ungraciously, at last, the Commons yielded; they gave an entrance to the reporters. Yet no better friend has Parliament than these "strangers." For what is the function essential to the very being of the House of Commons? Its special function is to influence, and to reflect back the influence of the nation. Its special strength is the will and power of our country. It guides that will by its debates, and to that will owes all its power. Here, then, the newspapers step in and play the great part they do in the government of England. Were it not through the newspapers, how would Parliament speak to the people? and if the newspapers did not

[1] March 12, 1771. "Cavendish Debates," ii. 377.

return answer, how would Parliament learn what the people thought? The voice of Parliament would be a very puny, inaudible sound did it not scatter its debates, its votes, and resolutions, far and wide; but it is by the newspapers alone that it could do so.

And how is it that newspapers have this great power of speaking to and for Parliament? Because they are utterly free from Government control: because the reporters are "strangers" in Parliament. That is why the House accepts their story of the debates without doubt; because nobody there controls the reporters; because no suspicion of party-deference attaches to their reports. That is why the nation reads implicitly the debates in the newspapers; because neither the State, nor the Parliament, nor any party, has the slightest hold over the reporters. Had an official the least finger in the printer's pie of type, this implicit confidence would cease at once. Truth of speech, straightforward ways, confidence between man and man, form the glory and the strength of a free country. Of this there is no more signal instance than the respect and power enjoyed by those unknown, unnamed, unrecognised gentlemen, the reporters of the Parliamentary debates.

And there is a lesson for us here. How is it

that these powers in the State, the newspaper press and the Parliament, work together so unselfishly and so well? This is the cause. Our leading newspapers are not class newspapers, the advocates of one separate interest, or of one separate portion of the community. Nor is Parliament the advocate of one separate class or interest distinct from the general interest. Thus newspapers and Parliament act with one common motive; they are inspired by one common spirit; they think and speak for all of us alike.

While this is so, Parliament will find its best defender in a well-principled newspaper press; even a defence against the most present danger that threatens the House of Commons. For this is the danger that is growing with the progress of the country: it is undue subservience by Parliament to the popular will. Despotic in their strength, fear must arise that constituencies may unduly hamper the free action of their representatives, and require too abject obedience from the House of Commons. If that were so, it would never contain men made noble by disinterested minds.

Against such a danger our newspaper press is the best defence. If the representative has been honest

in his parliamentary career—though that career contradict the wishes of his constituency—the newspaper speaks for him, inspired, like him, with independent courage; and if he has right on his side, it asserts that right, and justifies his conduct. Again, if a borough, angry at exposure by its representative of the borough's pet vice, refuses to return him again, the newspapers by their satire, at least, deprive the borough of any self-satisfaction in its baseness.

Long may this alliance continue; long may both our newspapers and our Parliament act together for the good of all alike. And how long will this last? Why, just as long as we merit such a blessing; just as long as each one of us lives and labours, not for himself alone, or for his class alone, but for the general good; just so long as we subdue our selfish interests to promote the common weal; just as long as we deserve to be called a nation.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

LECTURE THE THIRD.

DANGERS THAT HAVE BESET THE HOUSE.

Taxation the Root of Parliament.—No Privileged Class in England.—Queen Elizabeth and Parliament.—The Founders of the House of Commons' Practice.—The Practice on Trial.—Power of the Sovereign over Parliament.—Dissolution, Prorogation, Adjournment.—Freedom of Speech.—Dangers that beset the House.—Eliot and the Speaker, March 2, 1629.—The Arrest of the Five Members, Jan. 4, 1642.—Danger to Parliament from within.—The Gunpowder Plot, Nov. 5, 1605.—The Gordon Riot, 1780.—Sir John Eliot.—Conclusion.

AT a time when London city was perhaps as large as our borough of Reigate, and when the city of Westminster was barely a village, in years so far from us, so near the beginning of English history,—a king, who wished to govern justly, reigned in his palace at Westminster. He was styled, so pious were his intentions, King Edward the Confessor, and he desired, we may suppose, to act up to his title;

but he did not. He was too trustful of untrustworthy ministers. In the King's name, they oppressed the people, and wrung from them illegal taxes. This went on, yet of it King Edward remained ignorant. At length his eyes were opened. Moved by some mysterious impulse, he rose from his bed, asked for the key, and went unattended to the door of the Royal Treasure House. King Edward was alone when he stood outside; but the Treasury door unlocked, and he found himself in strange company. There, right before the King, in that stone-vaulted chamber, was the devil himself, capering about upon the royal money-bags; and from that lofty pile of gold the devil looked down, laughing loudly, and shouting with delight. Astonishment and horror filled the King's mind; yet his discomposure was not so much at the sight of the spectre itself,—as at the spectre's laugh. The devil's delight proved mischief to be on foot; the mischief evidently lay in the money. The apparition opened the King's eyes: no more gain of oppression, from that hour, went into King Edward's treasury.[1]

This fable is the history of the House of Commons in a nutshell. The money question has always been

[1] Palgrave's "Anglo-Saxon History" (Preface), p. 13.

the point in dispute between English subjects and their kings. The people ever maintained that they were entitled to tax themselves; that a tax without their sanction was an unrighteous tax. To maintain this right, they appealed to old tradition; to the memory, long as memory lasted, of national assemblies, of meetings where the subjects gave consent to taxation by the King. Then this tradition was solemnly recorded in charters or agreements between the kings and their subjects: then it became the foundation of a Parliament, in which all the estates of the realm voted what money-supply the King asked. And this system has been at work for 600 years; but for the first 350 years of its existence it did not work smoothly. The power of the King and the power of the Parliament were all unsettled: one power clashed against the other.

Then the fable told of King Edward the Confessor was fulfilled. In the year 1625, King Charles I. began his reign. For sixteen years he and his government oppressed England; his ministers exacted illegal, unparliamentary taxes; and during those years Parliament vainly tried to open the eyes of King Charles to the mischief going on: but he preferred to close his eyes. He hated the House of

Commons; to their remonstrances he would not listen. Then came the end; the devil was seen by all, not capering over the royal money-bags, but capering over England, Scotland, and Ireland. A bloody civil war broke out; the King and the Parliament sent armies against each other; and in the end, King Charles, on the 30th of January, 1649, was beheaded before his palace at Whitehall.

Devil's delight, and a civil war, and the misery of mankind, are all one and the same things; much devil's work went on in England during that fight between King and Parliament. Yet, to give him his due, though the devil was bloody, he was never cruel, nor was he a selfish devil. Both sides, both King and Parliament, fought out their fight fairly and honestly. For the King was backed by many, rich and poor, nobles and commoners, all honest backers, sincere in the Royal cause. Equally honest, equally of all ranks, were the Parliamentarians.[1]

That civil war, in fact, was not a class war; it was not between agriculturists against traders, or between untitled men against nobility, or the

[1] "In our own unnatural war, none, I hope, so weak and wilful as to deny many good men, though misled, engaged on both sides." Fuller's *Thoughts*, Edition 1830, 222.

rich against the poor. How was this, and how was it that the House of Commons drew to its side the most in number, and the most powerful of the English nation? To this question, these words, which the Commons once recorded in their Journal, may be taken as an answer, though it is not a direct answer:—"Resolved, that no member of this House hath any privilege against payment of any taxes granted to his Majesty, or any parish duties."[1] Curiously enough, it was that Sir John Parsons, who lived close by in Reigate Priory, that was thus denied an escape from payment of a poor rate, on the ground that he was a member of Parliament.

That resolution may not seem to you to be much, but it does contain a great principle. Most fortunate is it for England that the Parliament never acted in the spirit of Sir John Parsons; that such a claim was never granted; that this country never witnessed the formation of a privileged class. In England no rank of men was ever exempted from the common laws, from the common duty of paying taxes; no Minister of our Government, no Peer, no member of Parliament, was ever set apart in this way from his fellows: they all have, and they all had always, to put their hands in

[1] March 23, 1696. "Com. Journ." xi. 751.

their pockets when the tax-gatherer came round, just like you or me. Consider what the difference would have been, had England, in the Civil War, been split up into class factions; if that had been a fight, not for a great principle, but against oppressive privileges.

Had the King's friends taken arms, not to save the King, but to save their pockets, they could not have fought so honestly; and if Parliament had been separated from the nation by special exemptions, surely it would have fought, not for the people, but against them. Hence was it that the Civil War was great, but not ferocious. Had the contest been waged to tear the power of tyranny from the nobles, or from Parliament, or the rich in England, and not from a king only and some two or three of his ministers—above all, had it been a fight for bread—the people would have been as wolves, and the King's party as tigers; and this country would have tasted those horrors that France experienced only seventy years ago, during that awful Revolution.

By God's providence, we never had in England a privileged class; and by that providence, too, the dispute between king and people was always a money dispute. It is to that simple matter that we owe our just freedom. When Parliament grew

sufficiently powerful to control the King, it preserved that control by keeping its hand on the King's pocket. The motto of the House of Commons should be this old jingling rhyme—

> "For good, for ill, for better, for worse,
> He rules the roast, who rules the purse."

Humanly speaking, it was chance that gave this bias to English history; it was an unforeseen result that English society was never split up in hostile ranks of class against class, and that parliamentary taxation was the common and constant ground of dispute between us and our sovereigns. Equally is it God's providence that we have had for six hundred years a Parliament; but the preservation of this blessing was obtained not indirectly or by accident. Foresight was exercised, difficulties were overcome, and danger was risked, to keep for us our Parliament.

This is what I so earnestly wish to impress on you; why I am so much obliged to you for giving me such a liberal share of your time and attention. The freedom and independence of the House of Commons was earned for us by danger, difficulty, and death. The difficulty was great. Three hundred years ago the rights of the King and the rights of Parliament were in constant clash: to

curb the Parliament, a king then had many a means both legal and illegal. The very existence of Parliament depended solely on his will. It was then so in reality: it is still so now in form. A summons from the Sovereign calls Parliament into being; it is put an end to by direction of the Sovereign alone.

This was the case when Queen Elizabeth governed England: to govern us either with a Parliament or without one, she was free to choose: for, so powerless was the House of Commons, that she was quite able to dispense with its services altogether. Did she choose to support her Government out of her large estates, which was possible if she neglected England's prosperity; had she taken money voted by Parliament for one object, and applied it otherwise, as she could have done; above all, had she wrung illegal taxes from her subjects, as James I. and Charles I., the kings who came next after her, actually did—Queen Elizabeth need never have called Parliament together. And she was much tempted to dislike Parliaments. That Queen was by nature despotic; she had strong prejudices; she was jealous of her authority, and Parliament often contradicted her, and asserted its own authority. Fortunately, however, she preferred to

govern England in a parliamentary way. She preferred, with the help of the House of Commons, to maintain in this best way the national life and honour. Parliament sat, in consequence, under her in peace and regularity. And though the Commons occasionally grumbled, though it was complained that "gentlemen must sell their plate, and farmers their brass pots,"[1] ere the Queen's taxes could be paid; still we were satisfied to be taxed, if our national Council met to guard our right.

And, fortunately for us, with this season of frequent Parliaments arose the men to use it. The foundation of parliamentary government was laid during the reign of Queen Elizabeth; and those learned and wise countrymen of ours made sure that foundation by turning to the past. They opened the Parliament Rolls, the ancient records of the realm, they unfolded old and faded parchments, that quoted writings yet older still; and they proved from these records that a free Parliament was England's birthright—that in Parliament alone we could be taxed.

Then, as now, the strength of English freedom lay in the fact that it might be claimed as a birthright, as a true inheritance. Then, as now, Parlia-

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 493.

ment was no new thing; it was, "as heretofore accustomed," during all those three hundred years that came before Queen Elizabeth.

Nor were the statesmen who called that Lady Queen, at all blind advocates of a Parliament, or gnorant of the national strength and prosperity that springs from the union of all classes in a country's government. They fully felt the better fortune of England, and they contrasted it with the misery of the Continent.

It was, as they said in their debates, for lack of a Parliament, where all are able, "so far as may be, to help all," that the European monarchs exercised such absolute power—"that the Kings of France, of Castille, and Portugal, in making of laws do use their own discretion; that the King of Denmark useth the advice of his Nobles only, and nothing of his Commons." And what, they said, is the result of unparliamentary government?—that is proved by the "monstrous garments of the common people in some parts of Germany, the mangled commonwealth of the Allies, and the shadows of the great cities, which are now to be seen in Italy."[1]

Thus, what the House of Commons was to work

[1] Debate, April 19, 1571. D'Ewes' "Journal," 169.

for, and why it was entitled to work, these good subjects of Queen Elizabeth established. And they did more: they established how the House should work. They sketched out a method for its daily labour—a method followed to this day. Rules drawn up by the subjects of Queen Elizabeth are still in constant use by the subjects of Queen Victoria: the very words then penned have been uttered by the Speakers of the House for more than three hundred years. And you will allow that, to settle rules and principles of practice that exist, strong and substantial for three hundred years, was a sound piece of work. It is fortunate for England that in the days of Queen Elizabeth, we had such worthy workmen in our Parliament.

Besides the test of time, their work has stood many a strain; immediately, also, was its strength and substance destined to be tried, and tried to the full. For the Kings that succeeded Queen Elizabeth—James I. and Charles I.—hated the House of Commons: to govern England without a Parliament was the chief object of their desire, and they made the attempt: during these reigns, two years, four years, six years, and then eleven years rolled by while England saw no Parliament.

During all those eleven years, King Charles taxed the people illegally; he governed them despotically; trade was injured; all suffered much; and thus those years rolled by till April 1640, when King Charles was at last obliged to call a Parliament.

Then did the Commons find the use of a settled principle of practice. Directly, with no delay, undulled by the sleep of eleven years, without a moment's hesitation, the House of Commons sprang up in working order, and took the right course at once. They knew both what they ought to do, and how to do it. The King wanted money; the Commons insisted that, before they gave money, the grievances of the last eleven years should be redressed. Again and again King Charles demanded money before redress of grievances; again and again the Commons refused his demand. Then the King got the House of Lords to interfere with the House of Commons to persuade it to give the money; the Commons retorted upon the Lords, that with taxation they had nought to do. So King Charles dissolved Parliament in haste greater than he ever dissolved Parliament before, after but twenty days of session, with nothing done. Had not the Commons known what their duty was—had they not stood firm—

had they not thrown that legal stumbling-block in the King's way, his arbitrary course might never have received check. But it was checked: nay more, his oppression was stayed, and that within a few months from April 1640, because the Commons had done their duty—because they put redress of grievances before parliamentary supply.

Then followed five stormy months during the summer of that year. The King tried all he could to fulfil his schemes: to collect his armies, to establish Royal supremacy by the stroke of military strength. But he could not come to time; he failed to strike the blow; still it was very nearly struck. The blow would have fallen had King Charles's army-chest held but four weeks' pay for his soldiers. We are much indebted to the firmness of that short Parliament of 1640.

But what it had done for England was not visible at first. Most miserable was that summer; all men's hearts failed here, so nearly had the King succeeded. He did not: in November 1640, King Charles was again driven to meet his people face to face in Parliament, and Parliament had the victory; the King could not deal with it as he had dealt with Parliament before; he fled from London. Then came the

Great Civil War—but that lesson in English history is beyond the province of this lecture.

The teaching I gather from events during 1640 is this; namely, that the House of Commons owed the strength by which it waged effectual resistance to King Charles, to the labours of the parliamentary workmen of the time of Queen Elizabeth. Those statesmen had restored to public view the old legal proofs that our freedom is a birthright, which the people hold by the same title as the King holds his sceptre; and they supplied the House with well-planned rules of practice. Thus armed, the Commons acted with authority not to be resisted; and they worked together, and kept well together in the contest with King Charles. To gain that battle, they needed every help; for the King, as he could not dissolve the Parliament that met in November 1640, tried his best to overturn it. He set the City of London against the Parliament, and the nation against their Parliament, and the army against the Parliament. On three occasions did the King scheme to subdue Parliament by his soldiers. To resist assault so oft repeated, to get in the end the upper hand, the Commons needed strong authority and well-wrought rules. This they had, thanks to the men of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

The power possessed by our Sovereigns over Parliament has always been very great. Not only do they alone call Parliament together by their summons; the dissolution or the dispersal of Parliament is also their act alone, by a word from their mouth, or by proclamation in their name, and sealed with the Royal seal. In no other way can Parliament be dissolved. Hence was it, that to delay a dissolution this trick was once resorted to.

About eighty years ago, King George III. would have Mr. Pitt for his prime minister; and that he should not, the Commons, on the contrary, were obstinate. And so long as that Parliament was in being, the Commons could make their obstinacy of effect. They knew equally well, that Parliament once dissolved, such was Mr. Pitt's popularity, and the general wish to back up George III., that in a new Parliament the King and his minister would have a majority, and that the game the Commons were carrying on must end. While there was life there was hope: so, to throw Mr. Pitt out of the prime ministership, the Opposition did everything they could; most especially did they try to delay the hour when their power would cease, and to stop the dissolution. In vain: they saw one

day, that the very next day they were to be dispersed. Could that possibly be delayed, even by twenty-four hours? There was that last chance: if the Royal seal, the Great Seal of England, disappeared, the proclamation for the dissolution could not be made. And somehow, singularly enough, that very night the Great Seal did disappear. When the Lord Chancellor, who is the keeper of the Seal, came to look for it, in his library-drawer, it was gone.[1] Nor was the Seal ever discovered, or the thief found out. But the rogues were disappointed in the end. The trick proved useless. Within a few hours from the Great Seal's disappearance, Mr. Pitt had another Seal made: proclamation was made, that Parliament was dissolved, and the Prime Minister confirmed in office.

The Sovereign also alone prorogues a Parliament, or puts it to sleep. A dissolution is the death of Parliament: till another is called, every constituency is unrepresented: members of Parliament lose that dignity; their Speaker ceases to be Speaker; and the door of the House of Lords is locked. A prorogation only suspends the existence of a Parliament: the members of the Commons retain their seats,

[1] "Life of Wilberforce" (Ed. 1868), 28.

and their Speaker the chair; but Parliament cannot meet to transact business till the Sovereign gives leave. Nor can parliamentary business be resumed at the stage where it left off before the prorogation: every bill must be begun over again, every committee must be reappointed. The complete stoppage of all parliamentary work, for a time, is thus placed in the Sovereign's power by a prorogation.

An adjournment of the Houses of Parliament simply postpones the day of meeting: it does not affect the business of the session. So, to suit their convenience, Sovereigns have occasionally directed Parliament to adjourn. This was a step outside their province. No Sovereign can command an adjournment: it is an act belonging solely to each House. And the Commons, advised by that stout old lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, made a formal protest against a message from James I. commanding an adjournment of the House.

Content with this assertion of their rights, the Commons have never said "No" to such a Royal message. Once, however, on the 2nd of March, 1629,[1] the Commons declared that they would have their

[1] "The scene of the 2nd of March." Forster's "Life of Sir J. Eliot," ii. chap. 8.

say first, before they agreed to the King's wish; and on that day, as much as ever in his life, did King Charles desire to shut the mouth of the Commons—to compel them to adjourn. The Speaker of the House promised the King his aid; and with such help, success to the King's project seemed certain. But there was one among the members who was stronger than the King, and that was the brave and noble man, Sir John Eliot. He dared to frustrate the King's design; he sacrificed his life to gain for the Commons that voice which was to have been stifled on the 2nd of March, 1629.

The House met that morning as usual; prayers were read as usual; the Speaker was in his chair. If that 2nd of March had been destined to see then an ordinary day's work, that was the moment when it should begin. That day's sitting, however, began differently. Prayers over, the Speaker quickly rose up, bent to obey the King, and to give the message for adjournment. But he was too late: another actor took part in the scene. Sir John Eliot had also risen. In this race between King and Parliament, the Speaker, however, as yet was first: when he stands up, debate is hushed. And he kept standing: so Eliot could not speak; but Eliot also remained upright,

though silent. Eliot thus hushed without a word, the opportunity was still the King's—and in the name of King Charles, the Speaker told the House of Commons that they were to adjourn. Eliot still kept his feet; he did not heed the Royal mandate, but he again offered to begin his speech; and again the Speaker silenced him. "At once, must be the adjournment:" that, he said, was the King's command: by the King's order, all business here must cease immediately. Still Sir John Eliot kept his feet. Again he began his speech; but his words were not about the King's message, and again came interruption from the Speaker. Then murmurs rose around the chair. It was not, the members said, the King's right to command an adjournment; it was the right of the Commons to adjourn themselves;—that they would hear Eliot.

So Eliot resumed his speech, when once more, but for the last time, he was silenced by the Speaker. The King's command, he said, was express—nothing short of immediate adjournment—that, to compel the adjournment, he was ordered to quit his chair directly. The Speaker gone, the House was powerless—a headless mob: and, in a moment, the Speaker was all but gone; but, before that moment passed,

he was powerless. In the act of flight, two members started forward: they stayed him; firmly, but quietly, they pressed him back into his place; they kept him there safe, fixed down upon the Speaker's chair. Violent as was this course, it was the only course possible. If the Speaker had thus abruptly left his post, the power of the Commons was lost; save through him, no resolution could be voted, no legal debate be held. He had thus plotted to trick the House into forced obedience to the King; but, by the care of Eliot and his friends, he was counterplotted. Surprised and powerless, the Speaker remained both mute and motionless.

At last the King was beat; at last the voice of Eliot was no longer interrupted: he caught the attention of the House; it wavered no longer. For Eliot's were the "words of the wise," that are as "goads." He spurred on his hearers: he proved himself then, as often before, the "master of the assembly." The House listened; then the reason of the King's determination to stop debate was quickly clear. Eliot's words, from his first word to his last, struck harder and harder against the King's misguided ways—his refusal to hear the advice of Parliament, his neglect of the people's sufferings and

fears, the illegal taxes, the oppression by the King's ministers. And Eliot warned King Charles, that if he continued to distrust his people, to lean on the guidance of his ministers, to break with his Parliament, he would be broken in the end. The scope of his speech Eliot had condensed into a written resolution. When he ceased, in due order, he offered the paper to the Speaker, that he might read its contents to the House.

Then, again, tumult broke forth. The hush of fixed attention to Eliot ceased. Cries, and murmurs, and angry threats rang through the House: for the Speaker would not read to them Eliot's resolution, he refused to do his common duty—he refused to allow the House to vote upon the motion. The men who crowded the benches round his chair now were roused. There was no uncertainty now; their duty to their country was ringing in their ears; their hearts were moved by Eliot's words: he had inspired them with his devoted courage. They pressed forward to urge the Speaker to put Eliot's resolution to the vote. Threats and protestations were loud. The Speaker was told that he would be for ever a scorn to his countrymen; that he was a blot upon his family; that he was a dishonest Speaker; that the

King could not screen him always; that at last he would taste of punishment. Twice, with a rush of voice, the House required the Speaker to do his duty: —twice he refused. He confessed that he was wrong, that the King had no legal power over him as Speaker: he confessed that it was his duty to put the resolution to the vote of the House, but that still he feared the King so much that he would not do his duty. Resolute as was the Speaker, still the angry faces and angry voices of his brother-members shook even his dogged resolution. He burst into tears. Escape, by flight from the chair, he attempted once more. But it was no use; he was forced to stay.

Then, leaving off contention with their Speaker, the members started up, impelled by one common impulse, to do their duty, if he would not do his. Their acclamations showed that they, like Eliot, were true Englishmen, ready to live and die in defence of their country's welfare. With loud and united voice, the House of Commons protested, following the voice of Eliot, that they would punish with the severest punishment any State officer who advised or helped the King to act illegally against his subjects, as a "capital enemy to the kingdom and commonwealth." With shouts of "Ay, ay!" still

ringing overhead, the Commons then threw open the doors of their House, and poured out. They had done their best that day; nor will the 2nd of March, 1629, ever be forgotten. And they ended not a moment too soon; for they found themselves face to face with the King's Guard, sent there by his orders to break into the House.

Abuse of power cannot easily be dropped. From worse to worse, is the nature of that evil: and so it was with King Charles and his ministers. Then began those eleven years of unparliamentary government, when, without thought or fear of Parliament, the people were oppressed; then it was that Eliot was imprisoned until death; and his associates, who kept the Speaker in the chair, were prosecuted and fined. And government prosecution then involved far more than appears to us. Men beneath the illwill of those in power were exposed to loss and annoyance on all sides; a grudge against such could be safely taken out then. One of Eliot's friends computed his losses, by fine and imprisonment, at £10,000. and there is no reason to believe that an exaggeration.[1]

Eliot's imprisonment for words spoken in Parliament, illustrates the constant practice of our Sove-

[1] Forster's "Eliot," ii. 562 n.

reigns then. They claimed as a right to punish members of Parliament for speech provoking their displeasure; the Commons asserted that the House alone could judge of the propriety of words uttered before it. That the Commons had the law on their side, there is no doubt. All notice by a Sovereign of what the Commons say or do, save what is laid before him by the House itself, is quite illegal. And equally is it certain that the Commons of those days were quite unable to protect themselves against their monarch's displeasure. Even Queen Elizabeth — good Queen Bess as she was—if a member of Parliament vexed her in debate, she contrived to hear all about it; and she soon laid the worthy gentleman by his heels, at times even in that dreaded prison, the Tower of London. From one of these interviews with the Queen's government, a stout-hearted member came back to the House, "with such an amazed countenance, that it daunted all the rest;" so much so, that for days the Commons were frightened from their duty. If the Queen's ministers did but whisper together and consult upon their bench at the Speaker's right hand, such a sight of warning was enough to quench debate.[1] And so she

[1] D'Ewes' "Journal," 176.

went on, though ancient Parliament men declared it to be "doleful" that their mouths should be thus closed.

Queen Elizabeth, with all this, was careful not to go too far. She soon released such offenders, and appeased the House. Exactly contrary was the conduct of her royal successors. When the Commons addressed to King James I. a remonstrance, declaring that it was the House alone, and not the Sovereign, that could punish a member for speech in Parliament, he sent for the Journal-book from off the table of the House, and tore away the page on which the remonstrance, or "protestation," was written.[1] And his son, King Charles, was, you know, in his way as despotic.

Nor was his mind capable of receiving warning; even though the proverb, that a pitcher may go often to the well, and yet be broken at the last, is quite as true about kings as pitchers. Charles I. imprisoned members after Parliament was dissolved, and he imprisoned them even while Parliament was

[1] "Martis, 18° Decembris, 19° Jacobi, 1621. Post Meridiem.—The Protestation read several times; and upon Question, allowed; and ordered to be presently entered of Record in the Journal of the House. And every Member of the House, that will, to have . . . of it . . . . *Note.*—King James, in council, with his own hand, rent out this Protestation."—*Com. Journ.* i. 668.

sitting, yet he was never called to account; nor was an account demanded of him till, in a moment of desperation, he determined to seize the leaders of the Commons upon the very benches of their House.

Those eleven years of government without Parliament wrought in the end, you may remember, such national confusion, that to save himself, to avert a revolution, King Charles was driven to call a Parliament in November 1640; and that Parliament, you may remember also, got the mastery over the King. The King could not even disperse it, at his will, by a dissolution, for that power was suspended by a law. All legal power of silencing the Parliament being thus taken from him, the King could only silence it by positive violence—by the power of the sword. And even this last treachery against his subjects King Charles several times attempted.

Twice, at least, if not three times during the first twelve months of its session did he seek to move the army against the Parliament; but in vain. The year 1641 passed away; and Parliament was yet unsilenced. Then, in the very beginning of the next year, the King put his fortune to the final push. He had failed to surround Parliament by an army; for the army lay as far off as Yorkshire, and now

that army was disbanded; but he could collect a company of soldiers in his palace at Whitehall, and thus bring them within a stone's throw from Westminster: with such an armed force he could strike a blow at the House of Commons: if he could not overcome the whole body, still he could crush its head: he could arrest and carry off the five most leading members of Parliament out of the House itself.[1]

The King knew such a deed to be a crime akin to theft or murder; but he did not care. He foresaw downright resistance by the Commons to a wrong so flagrant; but he did not care for that. And the King proved that he did not care if the Commons resisted unto blood; for he took with him between three and four hundred men, armed with partisans, swords, and pistols, and set over them officers trained in foreign war and soldiers of fortune. These men hated the people, despised the House of Commons, and longed to place the King above the law, and themselves there with him. For several past weeks the King had feasted these men in his palace; he also fortified Whitehall; he collected stores of arms, and the men to use them.

[1] Forster's "Arrest of the Five Members," chap. xvii.

The conspiracy of the King against the House of Commons was long prepared. It broke forth on that day, the 4th of January, 1642. Suddenly, about two o'clock in the afternoon, when the House had re-assembled after dinner, King Charles, with his company of desperadoes, soldiers, and courtiers, filed out from under the gateway of the palace at Whitehall. He turned his face towards Westminster; his armed train came after; passing onward with swift foot-step, soon it was seen crossing New Palace Yard. The people fled from before that dread company, and closed their shops in terror, expecting nought but bloodshed and desolation.

Then the troop entered Westminster Hall, and immediately that vast chamber was lined throughout its length by the King's soldiers. And beneath the avenue of their uplifted pikes and halberds, Charles passed on; he ascended the winding staircase leading to the House of Commons; the soldiers pressed after, and filled the lobby—awaiting the King's summons to rush in. A blow burst open the outer door, and the King entered. He went down the length of the House, and placed himself in front of the Speaker's chair. The members took off their hats, and rose to their feet, in silent recognition of that presence;

the Speaker kneeled before the King. All was quiet there; no one spoke or stirred.

In silence then did King Charles stand gazing on the ranks of the House of Commons, that like him stood in silence, ranged row above row around, and on their close-set faces, fixed in still, sad, solemn expectation. And thus passed by a minute; a minute of waiting, that must have seemed a long minute to all: to the members it was as the hush before a storm; to the King the pause was time enough to show that, in vain, he had openly broken England's laws; that he had dared to do the worst, and had dared it uselessly. For the five bold patriots whom King Charles had come to carry, dead or alive, from the House of Commons, were not there. Sudden as he had been, they had escaped. Still the King had to go on; still he had to convict himself of his vain wrong-doing. He called aloud the names of the five members; but no one answered. He called on the Speaker to tell him if they were present; but Speaker Lenthal declined; he told the King that, "as Speaker, he had no eyes or tongue, save as the House commanded." This was his duty, and he did it nobly.

Baffled as was King Charles; baffled by the silence

of all around; baffled by the absence of the men he came to seize, his obstinacy bore him out to the end. He told the Commons that he was in the right in trying with his own hand to purge Parliament of traitors,—that he would have them wheresoever he found them. He left the House in angry, discontented passion; and then at last that silence there was broken; cries of "Privilege! privilege!" struck his ear, to remind him of the rights of Parliament he had openly defied. Thus King Charles left the House of Commons: his soldiers streamed out after him through Westminster Hall: the Hall he never again entered,—till years after, when he was brought there to hear his death doom.

The failure of that well-planned attempt to overawe the House of Commons must have surprised the King; and it may still surprise all who hear about it. The King's errand would have ended most differently, had not a man, the instant that Charles set foot in the street below, also started off above, to defeat that errand, clambering his way to Westminster over roofs and ridge-tiles. All at the King's court were not his courtiers; Parliament had, even there, well-wishers. They sent this man, at the risk of his life, to forewarn the members that the King

was coming, and what he was coming for. Just in time was the warning. Those to have been seized were in their wonted places: the very moment when those soldiers entered into Westminster Hall was the moment when the five members were hurried out from the House of Commons.

Had this been otherwise, England to this hour would tell of that moment's influence. Even had we been free as we are, it could not have been with an ancient freedom, long enjoyed in peace and quiet. Had the accused members been in their accustomed seats, the King must have ordered his soldiers to seize them; had the Commons done their duty to their country, they must have resisted: and many there were of the stuff to risk life in that good cause. Then would have ensued a dreadful struggle; in all probability parliamentary government would have sunk for ever in blood on the floor of the House of Commons. However, from this "extreme danger we escaped, through God's wonderful providence,"[1] and we may thankfully use these words, the words of a pious old member of Parliament who shared that peril; for, though since he wrote that sentence two hundred and twenty-six years have passed away, the

[1] The words of Sir S. D'Ewes; quoted from Forster's "Arrest," 196.

word "we" applies to us as well as to the House of Commons on the 4th of January, 1642.

Hostility of English sovereigns against their Parliaments, especially against the Commons' House, has been so much my theme, that I fear you will think that this hostility was constant, and that kings were always in the wrong, and the members always in the right. Neither way was this the case.

The House of Commons has, in truth, run more risk from its own conduct than ever it did from the conduct of any king. For open attack calls forth open resistance. But, if the House of Commons was willing to sell its stewardship—to take bribes to pass the measures of the Government—the evil would lie hid, and could not, unless it ceased of itself, be purged away without danger to the State. And this great danger did threaten England, quite as really as did the danger of invasion by the Spaniards; it was as much an undoubted fact as was the voyage by the Spanish Armada down the English Channel; nor did it threaten England nearly so long ago. It is just 280 years since Reigate sent some 800 volunteers to guard the coast against the Spaniard; but not much more than 100 years have elapsed, since members sold their votes to

Government. And danger from the Spaniard was rife only for three months; but this danger existed during about 200 years.

This really was the case. After the Civil War, though the monarchy was restored under Charles II., still the kingly authority never recovered from that shock. The House of Commons consequently gained power in the State, and acted freed from all restraint by Government. The too natural expedient suggested itself; indirect means to sway the House then were sought, and base men there were found willing to sell their votes. So convenient a means of governing was, of course, acceptable both to kings and ministers; and such a temptation once yielded to, both tempters and tempted naturally grew bolder. Even in the beginning of this bad practice, a minister under Charles II. declared with scorn that, to pocket their bribes, members flocked round him at each session's close "like so many jackdaws for cheese."[1] And such a pitch was reached in parliamentary corruption, that in 1762 a room was set apart in the Treasury office at Whitehall, where members openly flocked to re-

[1] Lord Danby's words, quoted in Townsend's "Memoirs of the House of Commons," ii. 240.

ceive 200*l.*, or 300*l.*, or 500*l.* for a vote. A treaty of peace between England and France, February 1763, was carried in the House of Commons by votes thus purchased, at the cost, it is believed, of 40,000*l.* So absolutely lost to shame were members then, that the Prime Minister himself was wont to offer the money; and even a refusal of the gift was considered discourteous. A bribe, in fact, became something to be declined with apologies, not to be flung in the giver's face.[1]

A world like this seems far enough off from us now; far further than it is by actual separation through lapse of time. Indeed, it is remarkable that I should be able thus fearlessly to describe to you such misdoing by members of Parliament not much above one hundred years ago.

Nor am I thus fearless to confess to this disgraceful conduct, because I suppose that any among us think lightly of bribery, but because so grave a stain upon the credit of the House of Commons seems now almost not to be believed. Even party-heat does not provoke approach to such an accusation. This is a wonderful change of feeling, both in the House of Commons and out of it. Not

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." i. 320, 322 (2nd Edition).

less strange are the circumstances of this great change, because it is quite impossible to define exactly the cause that produced it. The practice did not die gradually away,—it was full-blown at its last exhibition. No great catastrophe terrified members of Parliament from that crime; no law produced a growth of better feeling, for no mere law can ever improve the morals of society. Nor was this improvement, apparently, due to any open appeal to stay from that disgrace. Corruption among members of Parliament for years was scoffed at by writers and by actors, and denounced on the hustings, in the pulpit, and before the House itself. Till it ceased, it was notorious. But when it ceased, it ceased utterly, and at once.

Did no cause then produce this vast change of heart and mind? It may have been this: in curing this evil, the most active remedy seems to have been the conduct of the nation. England had a purer sense of morality than Parliament. The House of Commons is truly the mirror of the people; sooner or later it always reflects the attitude of the outside world, for good or ill. In this case, it was for good. The law courts had been, for generations, free from the vice of corruption. The judges, indeed, once were grossly

open to the charge, but that was nearer the time of the Spanish Armada than a century ago. And for many years prior to 1762, the acceptance of a bribe had become a rare disgrace among the better educated in England. Such an act would have been deemed a shame by all right-minded people, and by all who wished to be thought right-minded. The newspaper press, also, was then growing in power; yearly the actions of members were more and more brought before their constituencies.

Thus, silently but efficiently, this blot upon the history of the House of Commons was thoroughly wiped away. You must excuse my having detained you so long with this subject. But the gradual, irresistible, unseen growth of that frame of mind which makes it now impossible for a member of Parliament to take a bribe, is as great a deliverance as any recorded in our history; for, without it, Parliament and England had been ruined.

To return to my former remark, undoubtedly dangers threatened against Parliament have not been always threatened by our sovereigns. One great peril,—which was certainly no contrivance of king or minister against Parliament,—you will immediately recall to mind, when I beg you to

"remember, remember" that well-known day, the 5th of November.[1] Perhaps you are inclined to smile. As long as squibs and little English boys exist, certainly that day will not slip away unnoticed; and so covered under a heap of comic notions is the Gunpowder Plot, that it is not easy to think that it ever was a reality. We can hardly believe that Guy Fawkes wore the face of a live man, and not a face of pasteboard; that he had actually lighted his lantern, and laid match and train to thirty-six barrels of gunpowder; that, if he had not been seized in the early morning of the 5th of November, 1605, King James I., and his Queen, and the Prince of Wales, and both Lords and Commons, would have been assuredly blown to destruction.

Even when we read legal evidence of the plot, still it remains hard of credit. It seems impossible that fellow-men could have been guilty of so horrible, so singular, a scheme as that of blowing up the Houses of Parliament. But the plot was no mere dream of devilish mischief. The plotters were many; the design was on foot for months, even for years. It was prepared up to the last touch; the cellar over which King, Lords, and Commons

[1] Hume's "History of England," vi. 30.

were to sit in Parliament, was, till within twelve hours of their meeting, piled with casks of gunpowder. To make destruction more destructive, the casks were weighted down by iron bars. Nor was this mine a madman's sport; the object of the plot is as certain as the plot itself. When the whole of the English Government lay buried under the ruins of the Parliament House—when the whole nation was paralysed by the terror of that explosion—the conspirators intended to take one of King James's children, and proclaim the child Queen of England. They thought that all, thankful to escape confusion, would accept the child as their sovereign; and that the conspirators, as the little Queen's ministers, would govern England in the child's name, and make once more the Roman Catholic religion the established religion here.

This was the temptation that led them on; a temptation which sprung both from their religious faith and from the conduct of the Protestants. Our conduct cannot be overlooked. The bulk of English people held the Protestant faith, and so, of course, did the Government; and both people and Government were determined, by law and by persecution, to root out Popery. The Roman Catholics, in con-

sequence, both high and low, rich and poor, suffered much. They were fined and imprisoned; their priests were hanged at Tyburn; what little comfort was left to the lives of Catholics was destroyed by life-long fear and trouble. Persecution provokes return in kind; that is natural enough. And to this natural craving was added a misleading influence that stamps the Roman Catholic creed—the dogma, namely, that salvation belongs solely to believers in that faith. The conspirators also knew that the heads of their Church did not disapprove of bloodshed, if the blood was shed in its behalf. Provocation to these plotters, then, was strong. They firmly trusted in their religion: they firmly believed that restoring it to England was restoring salvation to England. They and theirs also suffered bitter persecution daily; and from such persecution they saw no other escape.

Provocation sufficient to tempt men to a plot like the Gunpowder Plot must, indeed, have been strong. We were all horrified this summer by that accident to the Irish mail-train in Wales. Thought of that accident horrifies us still; without a rush of terror, it is impossible to think that seventeen men and women were, in a single moment, burnt up and crushed into a heap of ashes. Sudden death compels solemn

thoughts—thoughts which we are too glad to stifle; but thought will hardly bear to dwell, force it as we may, on the death those travellers met with.

Yet death as horrible to countless fellow-creatures the Gunpowder Plotters deliberately tried to compass. They foresaw that, at the opening day of Parliament, both the Houses, the King, the Queen, the little Prince of Wales, the children who were his companions, and the ladies and gentlemen of the Court, would be collected within the Parliament House; that, under that roof, a crowd of some 700 people—men, women, and children,—would be gathered together. To burn and crush them in one moment was the deliberate intention of the conspirators. And they did not mind destroying by the explosion all who would naturally collect about the Parliament House, and all the densely-peopled dwellings hard by. And they were willing to sacrifice many of their own religion; for they knew that many must necessarily be seated in the Parliament House, and that many might probably be in the crowd outside. This was discussed; but the conspirators agreed that it did not matter. They deliberately plotted to destroy their fellow-religionists.

Nay, more than this, the conspirators knew that

friends, benefactors, and their own kindred—fellow-men still more closely bound to them, men who were endeared, not only by a common religion, but by blood, by ties of affection, by the debt of gratitude—would also be seated in the Parliament House over the powder barrels. This also was discussed, —in answer, a conspirator declared that were his son in the room above he would himself fire the mine below. So they agreed to blast in that flame their friends and relations.

The horror that attends the Gunpowder Plot is not yet exhausted. Massacres as pitiful the world has seen as the massacre they planned; but such cruelties were the sudden outbursts of a raging mob, or the deed of a despot mad with power. Never did any number of men devise a slaughter so indiscriminate, so sure to inflict cruel death on kindred, friends, and brother-worshippers; or a slaughter so long planned. The plot was on foot for at least two years; during five months the powder was stored beneath the Parliament hall; not less than twice did they postpone and renew the attempt. Nor were the men who so long kept this guilty secret, men desperate from want, or of depraved lives, or blinded by brutal ignorance. As Guy Fawkes

boasted, they were all gentlemen. One of the leaders in the plot was quite a young man, who dearly loved a young wife, of deservedly good standing in the nation.

Nor was the plot an easy matter to its contrivers. Though unused to manual labour, they had to work like "navigators," breaking through rock-like walls, boring under the foundations of the Parliament House. Day and night they laboured. And over their painful task was thrown the anxiety of suspicion; for, as the 5th of November, 1605, approached, they became aware that the plot was not altogether a secret; that something about it was known by the King's Government. Still the conspirators went on. The King's messengers even visited the cellar on the 4th of November; they saw and talked to Guy Fawkes; still he kept his station under the Parliament House; still he laid the train to the barrels, kept the match ready in his pocket, and hung the lighted lantern behind the cellar door. Thus all through that night, until the early hours in the morning of the 5th of November, did Guy Fawkes keep watch over the powder barrels. Weary of the close air in the cellar, he stepped, for a moment, outside the door; that moment he was on the ground and pinioned; an

instant left to him, free-handed, and he and his captors would have been crushed under the ruins of the Parliament House.

Had all the conspirators been as relentless as Guy Fawkes, the plot must have been successful. It failed, solely because it was too horrible: because it surpassed too greatly the deeds of the most wicked. To some of the plotters, the death of those dear to them was an intolerable thought. One had an old friend, revered with life-long respect, who would assuredly be seated above the mine; there was a benefactor who had rescued one of the conspirators from beggary; relations also of some would be for a certainty in that fatal room. So to several of these, as that 5th of November drew near, came mysterious warnings. One reached a Lord Monteagle; it was an unsigned, almost unintelligible letter. The writing came to him late at night, left at his door by a muffled man. It warned Lord Monteagle that this "Parliament shall receive a terrible blow, and yet not see who hurts them;" that he must, if he valued his life, not go near the Parliament House.

The letter Lord Monteagle carried to the Government. At first it was deemed a hoax. Forged

documents, throwing suspicion on the Roman Catholics, were but too common then. That there was a plot on foot, however, the Government had received warning; and they were put on the right track by those words, "a terrible blow" from unseen hands. They counter-plotted the conspirators, and seized Guy Fawkes just in the nick of time. His fellow-conspirators heard of his arrest; they took horse, and rode madly through the country. Without hope of escape, they fought desperately: they all were either killed in the pursuit, or executed afterwards.

Than these conspirators, truly, never were men more horribly enslaved; none ever more displayed the awful verity of that warning, "take heed that the light which is in thee, be not darkness." Great was the darkness of their hearts. These plotters devoted themselves, soul and body, during two whole years, in contriving cruel death for numberless of their fellow-creatures. They never flinched; they were sustained, for they knew they did all in God's service. They thought so still, at that moment of despair, when the plot was discovered; they thought so still, when hunted across the fields like wild beasts. Though men of their own religion cried shame on

them, and shut the door against them, yet these men could no way see their guilt; nor did they—till taught by the touch of that very pain they had prepared for others. Having taken refuge in a house, their ammunition being damped by November storms, they were drying the powder before a fire: a spark fell from the grate; an explosion followed, and they were pitiably burnt. Then, but not till then, did they confess that surely God was against their enterprise.

The terror they caused was long felt. When on the 14th of May, 1610, the French king, Henry IV., was murdered in the streets of Paris, England saw in that fatal event the working of the Gunpowder Plot; for it was believed that the assassin's knife struck the King because he had warned King James of "the sudden blow" to be given him in the Parliament House.[1] In times of panic, whenever this country was disturbed, for many years, the popular fancy supposed that another gunpowder plot was again on foot. In May 1641, all London rushed to and fro, agitated by the news that the House of Commons was in a flame;[2] and this alarm was repeated in the

[1] Kennet's "History of England," ii. 675.
[2] Husband's "Diurnal" (1641), 93.

winter of that year.[1] Again, nearly a century after that day, the 5th of November, 1605, "there was a discourse of blowing up the two Houses of Parliament," knockings were heard at night in Old Palace Yard, and a search was ordered by the House.[2] And even to this day, the memory of the Gunpowder Plot is kept alive, not by the anniversary bonfires only, but by Parliament itself; for, before the opening of every session, a company of Beefeaters, the old warders of the Tower of London, come and examine all the vaults and places below the rooms in which the Lords and Commons sit; though, as you can fancy, they find there nothing at all more terrible than gas and water pipes.

A popular assembly always chances the ill-will of the people for whom it legislates. And not less than eleven times have the walls of the House of Commons echoed back the cry of an angry multitude without. Thrice, at least, even in comparatively recent times, excited crowds touched almost the point of open violence. In the year 1733, a new excise measure, proposed by Sir Robert Walpole,

[1] King's Pamphlets, British Museum. "A Terrible Plot against London and Westminster discovered," 1642.

[2] November 1, 1678. "Com. Journ." xxx. 530.

George II.'s prime minister, provoked fierce opposition throughout England. An immense mass of people collected before the House of Commons while the measure was under debate. They even laid hands on the Prime Minister as he was wending his way home. And in March 1771, the popular ferment excited by Mr. Wilkes, provoked much mobbing of members of Parliament from a howling crowd around the House.

Threat of violence from without has always been met with proper firmness within. On one occasion, however, the courage of the House of Commons was sorely tried. This was during the Gordon Riot of 1780.[1] This riot was called the Gordon Riot because the folly of a half-crazy young nobleman, Lord George Gordon, was the spark that lighted up the blaze. The least instructed of our fellow-countrymen were then, as such are always, the most prejudiced and the most intolerant. For two centuries, in England, to hate and fear a Roman Catholic was as natural as it is now—not to fear or hate them. In 1780, however, this panic fear was very rife; and it was turned against both the Government and Parliament, because some of the old persecuting laws

[1] Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." ii. 125.

that pressed iniquitously on Roman Catholics had then recently been repealed. These laws had not for many a year been put in force, public feeling not allowing it; but their repeal was much disliked both in England and Scotland. This angry feeling first showed itself in tumults at Edinburgh and Glasgow: houses belonging to Roman Catholics were burnt and sacked; they were beaten; their lives were threatened.

In London, however, the popular ferment first took the shape of countless petitions to Parliament to restore the penal laws against the Catholics. And in this harmless way, doubtless, the "No Popery" cry would have worked itself out, but for the unfortunate meddling of Lord George Gordon. Half knave, half madman, he delighted in acting the popular leader. He urged the Londoners to try what threats of violence would do. He called large outdoor meetings; his raving speeches excited crowds already enough angry. As Parliament would not listen to their petitions, he proposed that Parliament should see the people they would not hear. He proposed to lead to the door of the Houses of Parliament 20,000 men, petitioners against Popery. Then, he said, perhaps their prayer would be favoured.

Lord George Gordon fulfilled his threat; he far more than fulfilled it. Not 20,000 only, but 100,000 followed him there: and, of this 100,000, thousands were mad with fear and hate of the Roman Catholics, thousands were mad for mischief, many were mad with drink. Led by Lord George Gordon, as mischievously mad as any, the rabble beset the Houses of Parliament. They swarmed around; and, following the custom of an angry mob, they raged, and howled, and fought; they hustled and beat the Peers and members of Parliament; they surged in through Westminster Hall up to the very door of the House of Commons. For hours the lobby outside was filled by the rabble; for hours the House itself resounded with their cries of "No Popery," and with the noise of yells, and shrieks, and blows. And to keep out this fierce tide of madmen, to protect the lives of the members, there was nought but six old watchmen and the thin planking of a door.

Nor did Lord George Gordon allay the storm he had raised; he did all he could to provoke it higher and higher. He presented to the House of Commons the "No Popery" petition, and demanded that it should be immediately considered. He did worse than that: when the Commons refused, with proper

spirit, to look at a petition so disgracefully urged upon them, Lord George harangued the mob in the lobby. He exhorted them to continue where they were, and to continue their tumult. He even inflamed their fury more; he told them that their petition was being rejected; he named to them the members who refused to receive it, and who avowed their open abhorrence of the riot and of its cause. "Do you know," he told the rabble, "do you know, the Prime Minister calls you a mob?" So the tumult raged on. The Commons equally continued firm; they did not hesitate, but still refused to look at the petition. No help, however, came. For hours it seemed, indeed, that to fight their way out was their sole poor chance of escape. Still Lord George Gordon continued to aggravate the raging mob. His tongue, at least, the members could stop. One, a kinsman, stepped up to him, took him by the collar, and threatened to plunge his sword through his body if the foot of a rioter passed over the threshold of the House. One source of mischief, at least, was thus silenced; and no accident, fortunately, occurred to provoke actual assault, to irritate the rioters into exchanging shouts and threats for blows. A troop of soldiers at length appeared in

Westminster Hall: the crowd melted away, the lobby of the House was cleared, the members got home in safety. Thus ended the 2nd of June, 1780. Fortunately, the mob did not then know their strength, else that evening might have witnessed a very different scene.

For, what a risk the House then ran was shown by the state of London during the next week. During all those days London was as a city taken by storm. The mob got the upper hand, and the Government was utterly frightened. The City was fired in thirty-six places, houses were gutted, Roman Catholic chapels pulled down, the Bank of England was attacked; Newgate prison, just then rebuilt at the cost of 140,000*l.*, in a few hours was destroyed. The first to recover courage was that stout old King, George III. "One magistrate, at least," he said, "shall do his duty;" and he ordered in soldiers from all parts of the country. Then, at last the terrified citizens heard the dreadful sounds of suppressing this dreadful riot. All through the night of the 7th of June, London echoed back the volleying of musketry; till dawn soldiers fought their way through the streets; and the Gordon Riot ended.

My story of the dangers that have threatened the House of Commons must close. I am much obliged to you for the opportunity you have given me of relating them. For the recital has this value in it: nothing is more likely to create a living interest in that noble assembly, than knowing what it has undergone, and what has been undergone for it.

The names of those who contested for our freedom on the benches of the House of Commons, I have not mentioned to you; mere names alone would soon be forgotten. The memory of one only will I strive, in all humility, to celebrate—I must do so, so beautiful is the memory of Sir John Eliot. For no remembrance has more engaging beauty than the remembrance of trouble a friend has taken for his friends; and such a friend to his country was Eliot, such trouble did he undergo for it, that he took the trouble—to die for England.

On the walls of an old mansion in Cornwall hangs the portrait of a man—of a man, solemn-looking, gaunt, and haggard. His eyes have that restless, appealing glance that bespeaks long pain of body, and long trouble of mind. The face is evidently the face of one wasted near to death by illness and adversity. My description of this picture is no fancy descrip-

tion; nor is this portrait a fancy picture: it is the faithful likeness of a faithful Englishman. For the picture I describe is the likeness of Sir John Eliot, taken in the Tower of London, during the month of November 1632, just before his death. How differently was life once reflected on that face! Eliot was a Cornish gentleman of good property, of good standing in his country. Worthy friends admired Eliot's worth, and he returned their regard: he enjoyed respect even from his enemies. His mind was stored with knowledge, he had every reason to love life, to hope to see good days; for he was endowed with ample means for serving England, both as a county landlord and in Parliament; and to do good to England, Sir John Eliot deemed the chief of good.

But all this he apparently sacrificed. He offended the reigning monarch, Charles I.; he was shut up in the Tower of London; he died there: his death was caused by that imprisonment. Wilfully he seemed to throw away all that endeared his life, all chance of doing good to England. But Sir John Eliot did right. He felt, nor was he mistaken, that his wasted life in prison was no waste; that the cause for which he died, was worth his death.

The cause for which Eliot died was justice to his country. He fearlessly maintained that it was the birthright of an Englishman to speak his mind freely in Parliament; he persisted in making King Charles feel the touch of his birthright. That was why Eliot died. Over and over again did he raise his voice in the House of Commons against the injuries that monarch inflicted on his subjects. Over and over again did he accuse the Ministers of the Government, who tempted the King to wrong, and who, in his name, committed wrong. To this cause, Sir John Eliot was constant. As constantly did he taste the ill-will of men in power. He was falsely accused, threatened, and imprisoned. Still he persisted fearless: nor was his work fruitless. On that memorable day, the Second of March, 1629, he encouraged the House of Commons to make that great effort to stay the King in his evil path, to protect England against injustice. They did so; but their leader they could not protect. King Charles saw that to maintain his authority, Eliot must be silenced, not for a time, but altogether. He was arrested and sent to the Tower of London.

Consider how much Sir John Eliot underwent.

Though he saw men set free, fellow-members of Parliament, and fellow-offenders against the King; though he knew that, if he too chose, he could have, not freedom only, but place and power; though he knew that his estate much needed the master's eye; though he knew that his children, who were motherless, greatly lacked their father's care; though his youngest child died, and he away; though he foresaw that his health must break under imprisonment; though, when his enfeebled lungs most needed warm air from the sun, he was placed in a stifling den, where he had only candlelight, and but "scarce fire,"—still Eliot never dreamed of desertion from the cause of his fellow-countrymen. And thus he rested faithful for their sake during nearly four years of harsh imprisonment—of imprisonment that he was aware must kill him.

That portrait truly pictures the outside look of a worn-out captive—of Eliot with death in view. Yet, in his dark cell, under death's shadow, Eliot was cheered by radiance beyond expression from a painter's hand, more truly bright than the sun's brightest ray. To the last he declared himself joyful—joyful in the thought of God's love, joyful in gaining by affliction that love in its fulness. Thus Eliot died, on the

27th of November, 1632, at peace with God and at peace about his country; for he knew that true Englishmen would take up England's cause where he in death dropped it.

A benefit underrated will soon be a benefit lost. A free and independent Parliament is as great an earthly benefit as a people can enjoy; surely taught by Eliot's death, we ought not to undervalue such a blessing; surely, for his sake alone, we ought to prize aright the House of Commons; we ought to do our best to preserve our Parliament in freedom and independence. Nor may we hope for this, unless we do our best, and what is more, if we do not,—no Eliot among us now could save his country. The maintenance of Parliament rests with us alone: it is the nation alone that can keep alive our nation.

For the dangers that threatened Englishmen during Eliot's days, are not the dangers that now threaten us. Despotic interference by a monarch with Parliament is utterly at an end. A king's influence there is limited by the just influence of his ministers. On Parliament, too, the whole fabric of the State depends. If the House of Commons did not hold its yearly session, the army and navy must disband

for lack of pay; the law courts would close, and all government must cease. The Commons now may talk at will; they need cast no trembling glance at the Government Bench; of arbitrary dissolution and prorogation, or of illegal adjournment, Parliament has now no fear.

Is there then no fear for the Parliament of this country? Must it certainly be maintained for ever in authority and integrity? That I cannot assure you. Though sovereigns and their governments can work Parliament no ill, the independence of Parliament must be always open to danger from without: its being and power must for ever depend on us, who return the Parliament.

By his life and death Eliot laid that duty on our shoulders. He lived and laboured, and he lived and died, that England might have a free, powerful, and independent Parliament. Thanks to him we have it: he has given us a House of Commons that truly represents, that is the true mirror of the nation. That mirror, then, should always reflect Englishmen like Eliot. Like him, we must raise our voice honestly and courageously for the welfare of our country; we must fear both God's law and man's law. But if we fall from Eliot's bright example; if

the nation shrinks from doing justice, because it seems dangerous; if we are indolent, because indolence is comfortable; if we, in truth, do not do our duty, as Eliot did his—neither will its duty be done by Parliament.

NOTES AND INDEX.

NOTES.

NOTE A, p. 24.

Committees on Bills (the ancient Practice of).—The Committee Document Lord Digby was accused of stealing.

Bills are referred to Select Committees, generally composed of seven or fifteen members, or to the "House" sitting in committee. I was the more reluctant to burthen a lecture with these details, as the reference of bills to the "House" in committee is not the happiest feature in the parliamentary system. Such a committee is, in fact, only the House of Commons over again, without the Speaker's presence, and with power to members to speak as often as they will. But a deliberative body, composed at chance of any number of legislators between 600 and 40, sitting dispersed over a large room, is of far too uncertain and fluctuating a composition to give that close, unbroken attention, that the details of a bill, if long and intricate, require. This has been well explained by Mr. Bagehot, in his "English Constitution." Nor is the practice of revising bills in Committee of the House sanctioned by antiquity. Sir T. Erskine May proved it to be a comparatively modern usage, dating only from about the year 1700. And that eminent authority has advised a modified return to the ancient method of considering bills in Select Committee. (Business of the House Committee, 1854, Report, p. 31.)

The appointment of Grand Committees, each endowed with a well-defined sphere of action, supplied the Commons, prior to the Civil War, with an admirable legislative machinery. Yet, so anxious were those old Parliament men to secure accuracy, by restricting the number of heads in council, that, when revision of sentences needing careful study occurred, they immediately detached from the Grand Committee a Sub-committee, and sent it off to sit at once, and where it could, so long as it did the work. For instance, the Sub-committee that drew up the charges against the Earl of Strafford sat "at the house where Mr. Pym lodged." (Com. Journ. ii. 127.) This we learn owing to the inquiry made touching the disappearance from Mr. Pym's table of an important document; namely, the summary of Sir. H. Vane's preliminary evidence on which Strafford's accusation was based, "writ by Sir W. Earle's own hand." (D'Ewes' MS. Journ. April 23, 1641.) Lord Digby was credited with the theft, partly "because he was last in the chamber" where the Committee sat, and also because he made himself conspicuous by an over-fussy zeal about the safety of the papers on Mr. Pym's table. (Letter from Mr. Nat. Tomkins to Sir J. Lambe, April 26, 1641. State Papers.)

Great stir was caused by the disappearance of Vane's evidence; for it was all-important to keep it in the background. Nor has the stir ever since quite died away; as it has been always thought that the vanished document was that copy of the "notes" which Vane jotted down under his hat at the Privy Council of the 5th of May, 1640, and which Pym produced to the House of Commons on April 10, 1641. Those "notes," I must remind readers, authenticated Strafford's celebrated proposal to King Charles to subdue England by the Irish army; and as their production in Parliament cost Strafford and the King their heads, and England the Civil War, interest may well attach to such a bit of paper.

Misled by a passage in Whitelock's "Memorials," historians affirm that those "notes" were lost at Strafford's trial; that Lord Digby stole them; and that some years after they were found in the King's tent. And so the mistake has been constantly repeated, although the "Commons' Journal," ii. 119, expressly states that the document was laid before the House of Lords, "for their consideration," on the Monday following Saturday the 10th of April, the day when that paper was

first divulged by Pym: proof in itself sufficient to show that this was not the lost committee paper. And, indeed, after the publication of those "notes" to Parliament and England, the King and Strafford might have had them and welcome; they certainly had a copy of them, for one lies now among the State Papers. Not so with Vane's preliminary deposition; for, as his tongue could hardly be brought to confess what his pen had recorded, the hints contained in his hesitating first testimony about the discussion at the Council of the 5th of May, suggested to Strafford's friends some very damaging questions at the trial.

NOTE B, p. 28.

The Royal Assent.

The Crown is not so wholly under the thumb of Parliament as appears from the cessation of the power to deny the Royal assent to a bill. No bill can be entertained in Parliament that affects the Royal prerogative, hereditary revenues, personal property, or interests, without an authoritative announcement of the Royal consent. (Sir T. Erskine May's "Treatise," p. 426. 6th Edition.)

NOTE C, p. 33.

The Site and Entrances of the old House of Commons.

The dingy room, "the mean-looking building, that not a little resembles a chapel," that Mr. Moritz saw and described, was the old House of Commons, the chamber enclosed within the shell of the ancient walls of St. Stephen's Chapel. Young readers may need this reminder. Mr. Moritz saw then the room fitted up by Sir C. Wren, in 1706, and he was acute to trace therein the outline of an ecclesiastical building; for long before the year 1706, wainscot and ceilings had hidden from view every Gothic feature, and the beautiful frescoes of early English art that decorated the walls of St. Stephen's Chapel. The Elizabethan House of Commons, however, had them in view; for, in a

debate on the bill "To redress certain abuses used in painting," 12th December, 1601, Sir G. Soame ended his speech with an appeal to "these Walls thus curiously painted in former Ages, the Arms so artificially drawn, the Imagry so perfectly done, do witness our Forefathers' care in cherishing this art of painting." (D'Ewes' Journ. 681.) Subject to this comment, for Mr. Forster evidently did not credit that room with anything pretty to look at, I trust that such as care to enrich their mind's eye with a picture of the ancient House of Commons, will read his description of it in the essay on "The Grand Remonstrance."

The humbler task of tracing out the ground-plan of the old House is left to me. As showman, then, I command visitors entering "St. Stephen's Hall" from Westminster Hall to halt under the west doorway. They now see before them the area formerly occupied by the House of Commons, and its lobby—the lobby serving both as an outer-hall and as a division-lobby. About one-third of the pavement before us was given to the lobby, for the partition that divided it from the House stood on the line between the statues of Chatham and Mansfield. The Speaker sat at the east end of the Hall, the one furthest from our station, as his chair was placed a few paces in front of the steps ascending to the "Octagon Hall;" and these steps cover the site of the little lobby at the back of the old House, called "Solomon's Porch." It was here that, "saving his reverence," young Mr. Pitt, upset by overwork and over-excitement, vomited, whilst he held the lobby door open with one hand, that he might hear Fox's speech, to whom he was to reply. Saturday morning, early, 22nd of February, 1783. (Wilberforce's Life, p. 12, Ed. 1868.)

I will now point out the entrances to the ancient House. Keeping our place under the west door of St. Stephen's Hall, on our left side is the entrance to the Private Bill Office; that arch is modern, and so is a winding corkscrew staircase that leads thence down into the cloisters; and so is a doorway that opens from those stairs into Westminster Hall; but both stairs and doors are sufficiently in position to justify my asserting that this was the accustomed route taken by members to the House between the years 1547 and 1680; for, when the Commons left the Abbey Chapter-house hard by, and came to sit in St. Stephen's Chapel, it was by a door cut in Westminster Hall wall, under the second window from the south-east corner of the Hall, and by steps leading from the cloisters

up into the ante-chapel of St. Stephen's Chapel, that the members entered their place of council. So it was here, I may affirm, without affecting too greatly a showman's undaunted faith, that Cromwell told Falkland, soon after two o'clock A.M. of Tuesday the 23rd of November, 1641, that, had "the Grand Remonstrance" that night been rejected, he would have sold all, and left Old England for the New; and up these steps, undoubtedly, did King Charles pass to arrest the five members (Forster's "Arrest," p. 183). This means of access was in use until the year 1680, when a door was cut through the south end wall of Westminster Hall, that led into a passage communicating with the west end of the Commons' lobby. Bearing this in mind, it is obvious that this west door of St. Stephen's Hall, and the steps passing thence down into Westminster Hall, indicate the public entrance to the House of Commons in use between the year 1680 until the fire of 1834. Signal, too, is the claim this doorway also has on the associative fancy; infinite is the variety of fame and name with which it may be coupled; for it was trod by Somers, Harley, and Henry St. John, Pitt and Fox, Sheridan, Erskine, Burke, Windham, the Duke of Wellington, Steele, Macaulay, Sir Robert Peel—and sadly for him was it that Mr. Perceval passed along here, about four o'clock on the afternoon of the 11th of May, 1812, for on the spot where Burke's statue stands, by the left side of this very door into St. Stephen's Hall, watched, pistol in hand, the madman Bellingham.

NOTE D, p. 71.

The Speaker's Mace.

It is a popular mis-fancy that the mace now borne before the Speaker is the "bauble" mace that Cromwell ordered away when he dismissed the "rump" of the Long Parliament, 19th April, 1653.

The Speaker's mace of the reign of Charles I. doubtless perished when the Crown plate was sold "to the best advantage of the Commonwealth," 9th August, 1649.

Then came into service the Commonwealth mace, ordered June 6, 1649.

ornamented "with flowers instead of the cross and ball at the top, and with the arms of England and Ireland, instead of the late King's" (Parl. Hist. iii. 1314). This was the "bauble" mace that Cromwell treated so disrespectfully; and it soon disappeared altogether, for the Restoration supplanted it by a new mace, "with the cross and his Majesty's arms, as were formerly used" (May 21, 1660, Com. Journ. viii. 39). The mace that now lies on the table of the House bears neither date, inscription, or maker's name; but the initials C. R., the look of the workmanship, coupled with the order of 1660, assign it to that year. (Sir T. Erskine May's "Treatise," p. 183 n. 6th Edition.)

NOTE E, p. 119.

The first Publication of the Commons' Division Lists.

The present arrangement—permission, not sanction—to report of parliamentary debates is the best arrangement every way. Nor could Parliament drop the power of excluding at will every stranger and every note-book. Talk in Parliament, however, is of slight real import compared with the vote in Parliament; and, by an official publication of the division-lists, maintained for the last thirty-two years, the House of Commons most effectually places its actions before the eyes of every constituency. (Sir T. Erskine May's "Const. Hist." i. 441.)

So marked is this usage in the annals of the House, that its earliest indication deserves mention. The first printed publication of votes given in the House of Commons took place in January 1690. The lists of the divisions on the Corporation Bill of that winter were widely circulated throughout England. This step was, of course, unauthorized; being provoked, perhaps justified, by the manœuvres of the Whig party, who tried to smuggle that bill through the House while the Tories "were keeping merry Christmas by the blazing fires of their manor-houses." (Macaulay, "Hist." v. 164.)

And the very first publication at all of the Commons' division-lists happened in April 1641. During that month written placards were posted up on house-walls in Westminster, and on posts before the Royal

Exchange, bearing the names of the fifty-nine "well-wishers" to the Earl of Strafford, who voted against his Attainder Bill. "These are the Straffordians, betrayers of their country!" was the title at the top of the placards; and this open appeal to the people against votes given in Parliament was truly deemed a most alarming symptom, even in those disjointed times. The well-wishers to the King and his minister, anyhow, were guilty of conduct equally unwarrantable; for they, too, made public a rival placard, giving the names of "divers of the 204 that went out"— that is to say, who voted—"against Strafford;" and the title was, "The Anabaptists, Jews, and Brownists of the House of Commons." (Letter from Mr. Nat. Tomkins to Sir John Lambe, April 26, 1641. State Papers.)

The Royal lion has been so long the painter of the Long Parliament era, that this incident has hitherto lain concealed. But Mr. N. Tomkins, King's man as he was, has been too communicative for the credit of his party. And the fierce contempt and hatred which these ugly names applied to the anti-Straffordians were designed to provoke we can now hardly estimate; for, though the epithet "Jew" is still a living bit of "Billingsgate," "Brownist" and "Anabaptist" have long dropped out of the blackguard's vocabulary. "Colensoite" and "Fenian," especially if applied to a Dean of our Church or the Commander-in-chief, would be the nearest equivalents in vogue.

NOTE F, p. 127.

No Privileged Class in England.

The only other example within my knowledge of a kindred claim to that asserted by Sir J. Parsons, namely, of exemption from taxation on the score of parliamentary privilege, is to be found in the volume of State Papers (Dom. Ser. 1636-7). An entry on p. 134 (Sept. 21, 1636) discloses, incidentally, that assessors of taxation in the county of Gloucester were accustomed to rate Peers at half the amount paid by the commonalty. Mr. Bruce, in his preface, remarks, that such a lordly privilege "is so long obsolete, that it is totally unknown to the world at large, that it ever existed among us" (p. 34).

This remark also applies to Sir J. Parsons' attempt to evade payment of a parish rate; and that resolution of the Commons, dated 23rd March, 1696, lies on the Journal page, like a straw in a chance eddy of a stream, that shows a bias taken by part of the water, that else would be unnoticed; so strongly does the main current set in the contrary direction.

In proof that I have not been tempted, as discoverer of my text, upon a too energetic preachment on the principle it contains, I may refer to a passage in my father's "Merchant and Friar," p. 153 (Ed. 1844), and to an able article on this subject in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Nov. 7, 1868). The saving influence produced by the non-existence in England of "privileged orders, free from taxation, sharply marked off from the rest of the nation," is, however, very self-evident.

NOTE G, p. 131.

The Journals of the House.

The maintenance of English liberty is due, not so much to statute or charter, as to parliamentary precedents. An Act of Parliament is but a dead letter, compared with principles that give life to Parliament. That this was so; and the diligent study of these precedents by men, who, like Mr. Morice, strove while life lasted, "for freedom of conscience, public justice, and the liberties of their country," and by his successors in that cause, may be gathered from Mr. Forster's "Life of Eliot," vol. i. 412, 527. And accident supplied me with a curious illustration of the truth of Mr. Forster's remarks. It is a matter of notoriety, that the day Charles I. dissolved the Short Parliament, Tuesday, 5th of May, 1640, he issued search-warrants against Lords Warwick, Brook, and Say, and that during the night following, the pockets and cabinets of these noblemen were ransacked by the King's messengers. But the search went further. In a "news-letter" to Lord Conway, among the "State Papers," dated May 12, 1640, occurs this passage: "The last Wednesday, all the papers of the Earl of Warwick, my Lords Say and Brook, Sir W. Earle, Mr. Pym, and

Mr. Hampden, were taken from them, as well those they had in their pockets, as those they had in their studies and chambers." The result of this search is described; and it is stated by Lord Conway's informant, that from Mr. Pym's chamber was carried off "a trunk full of papers, journals of Parliament, which, though they can do him little hurt, yet are a loss of records."

Ease causes forgetfulness; and the ease with which the noted "Treatise on the Law and Usage of Parliament" answers to even the most hurried reference, provokes forgetfulness of the difficulty of composing the treatise. If members were forced to consult "trunks full of papers and journals of Parliament" for their guidance in the House, they would better appreciate the skill and insight that has fused the teaching of 600 years into a book of 800 pages.

That these illustrious men were thus molested has been as yet unknown; but the proof that the King's messengers visited Pym's and Hampden's studies, as well as Lord Brook's bedroom, does not rest on that "news-letter" alone, for the fact was brought forward in the debate on breach of privilege, Dec. 18, 1640 (D'Ewes' MS. Journal of Long Parliament). Mr. Forster, I think, will be glad to know that the penmen of the "Grand Remonstrance" were so signally justified in stating that the search of Wednesday morning, May 6, 1640, extended to "members of both Houses of Parliament."

NOTE II, p. 135.

The Crisis of 1640.

Examination of the State Papers for the year 1640, enables me to fix with accuracy the date of the exhaustion of the Royal treasury. Sir H. Vane wrote to Lord Conway, then in charge of the English army in the Yorkshire camp, on August 3rd, 1640, begging him to keep both officers and soldiers from the mutiny to which they were provoked, because their pay was "seven days behind," until the "moneys come down, which his Majesty and my Lords are hastening." None, however, did come down. And instead, riot among the starving troops, and

injury from their inevitable robberies, did "come down" upon Yorkshire apace during those months of August and September, till the appearance of the Scottish army, and the almost revolutionary fervour of England, compelled King Charles to summon the Long Parliament.

NOTE I, p. 179.

Sir John Eliot and Sir S. D'Ewes.

One hundred and twenty representations of the English monarchs, in marble, stone, bronze, glass, and colour line the Houses of Parliament within and without, and not an inch of space is found to commemorate either Sir John Eliot or Sir Simonds D'Ewes. Yet it is to these men, above any, that the House of Commons owes its being. For to preserve from destruction its forms and principles of action a life was devoted by D'Ewes, and Eliot died that those forms and principles might have life.

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THE END.

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